

MAY 1990
ISSUE 20
AN EMAP IMAGES PUBLICATION

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BATTLE COMMAND
REALTIME MAKES TRACKS



KICK OFF 2
ANCO DOES THE DOUBLE!

MAELSTROM BREAKS THE ICE!
MIDWINTER PLAYERS GUIDE



LOOM
LUCASFILM WEAVES ITS SPELL



CRIME...

BATMAN

is a shadow in the darkness, as elusive as a dream. High above the seamy streets of GOTHAM, he is a criminal's nightmare. The only hope for a desperate city...

BATMAN

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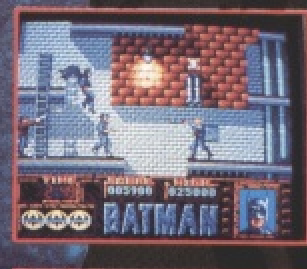
Take the wheel of your turbo-charged Porsche as you and your partner go in pursuit of dangerous criminals all driving an evil array of souped-up roadsters.

TURBO BOOST!

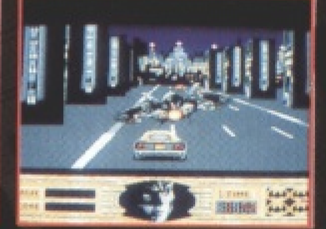
Need to catch up in a hurry? Well, just one press of your Turbo Button will leave your eyes in the back of your head!

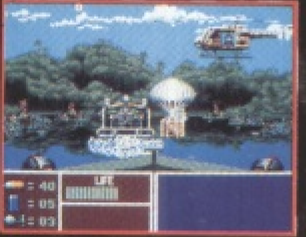
BARRELLING THROUGH THE CITY STREETS,

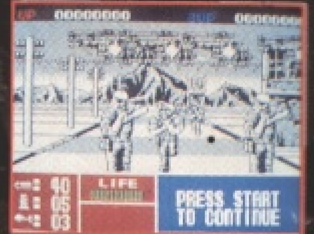
along the roughest of dirt tracks and through busy tunnels – if you can hold the line! The low life can run, but they can't hide...

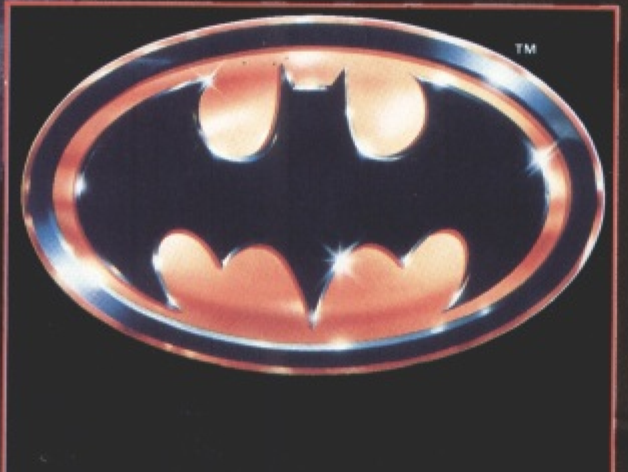








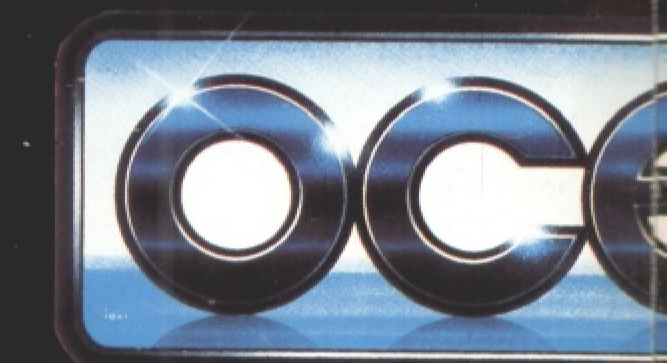








"a superb game, and captures the atmosphere and excitement of the movie perfectly... the most effective sprite-based 3D gamery I've seen... definitely the best film tie-in yet – make sure you don't miss the game." C&VG



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action sequences put you in control of Elliot Ness's elite squad of crime-busters.

ALLEYWAY SHOOTOUTS, THE BORDER RAID,

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ROOFTOP DUEL

as you re-live the knife edge existence of Ness in his struggle against the retribution of Capone!

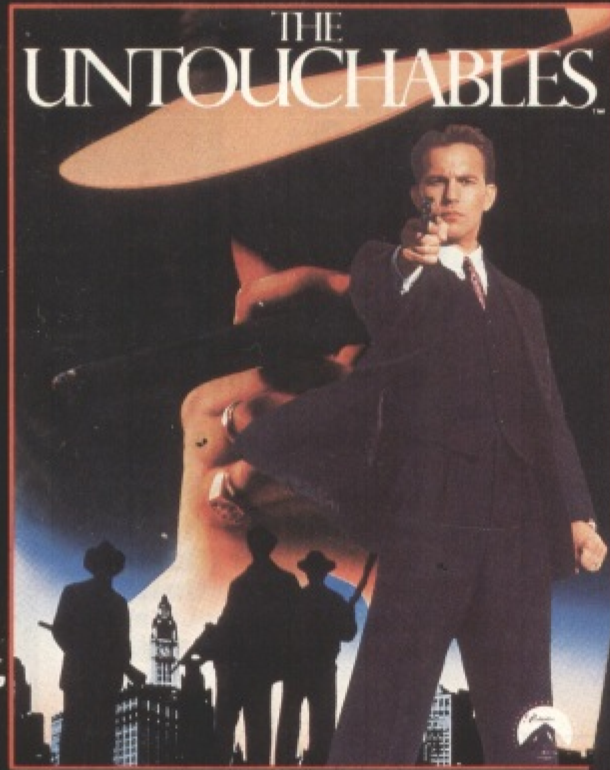














"a fine example of how to do the job properly . . . a cracking conversion . . . easily one of the most successful licences to date" Sinclair User

NOW FOR YOUR

SPECTRUM ATARI ST AMSTRAD AMIGA COMMODORE



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Telephone Numbers
NB! As of May 6th, London telephone numbers will change. Greater London numbers will be preceded by 081 and Inner London numbers 071. The One is based in Inner London, so our NEW numbers will be...

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Facsimile (071) 490 1095.

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A big 'ten-four good buddy' to: Rob McBride, George O'Brien and Margaret McGoldrick.

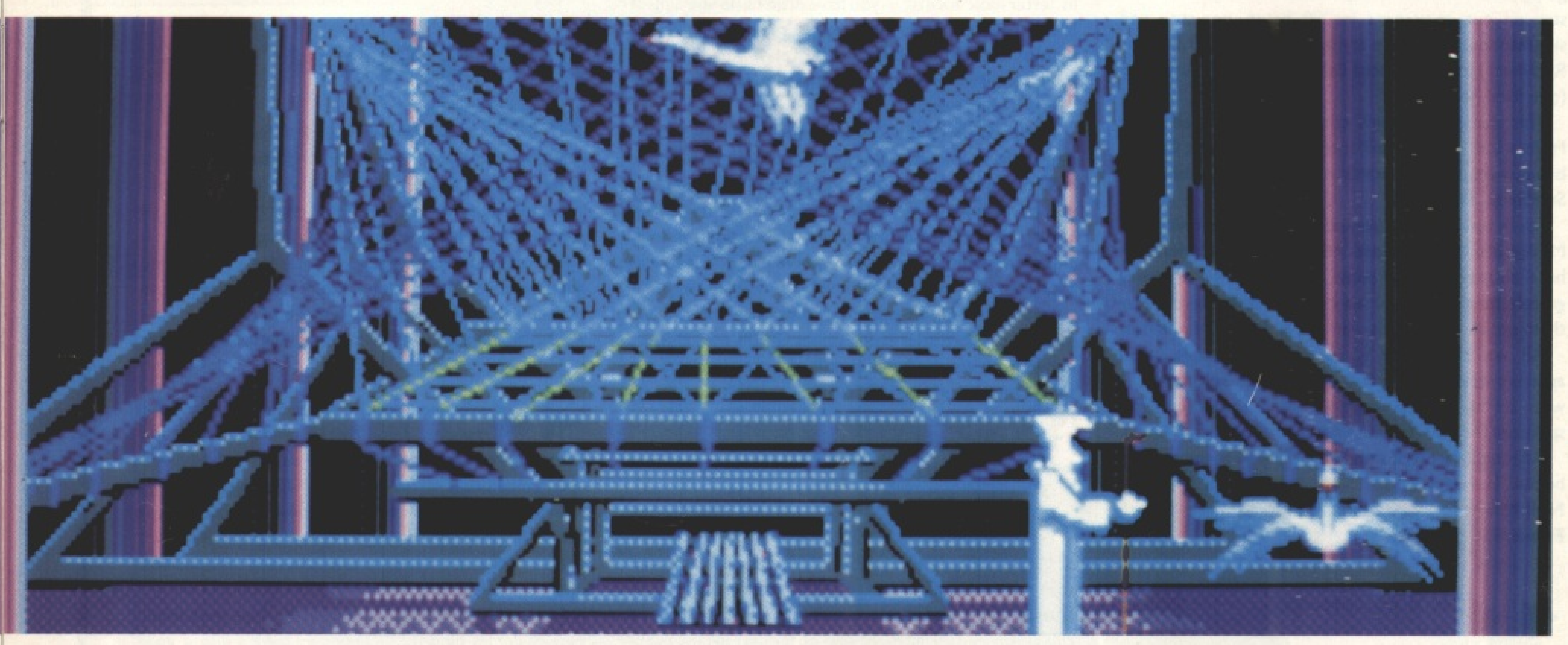








ONTENTS



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LETTERS

LETTERS, The One, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London ECIR 3AU.

CHARITY CHUCKLES

Dear The One,

My mates and I have got together and are going to do a 30-hour Computathon. This means that we stay on our computers for 30 hours, non-stop and simultaneously. We are trying to raise over 1,000 for Rochford Hospital Special Baby Care Unit Trust Fund (our local hospital).

This charity event will take place at Mansell Chair Frames Ltd, Unit 1 Charfleets Industrial Estate, Canvey Island, on May 26th – starting at 9.00am and finishing on Sunday at 3.00pm.

Some software companies – CDS, Electronic Arts, Mirrorsoft, Thalamus and Mindscape International – have already donated some games and we are very grateful for them. We have a variety of computers to play them on, including IBMs, Amigas, Segas and Nintendos.

All we need now is some more people, aged approximately 15-16 years old (any sex, culture etc...) who are willing to use their own computers, get sponsors for 150 (minimum) and stay up for 30 hours.

Anyone interested should contact me at the address below. Thanks a lot...

Neil Mansell, 53 St Marks Road, Canvey Island, Essex SS8 (NJ

Over to you, compassionate gamesplayers...

CANVAS QUEST

Dear The One,

I have played Konami's KWF Tagmatch Wrestling in the arcade and would like to know if or when it will be out for the Atari ST? Also, is Micro League Wrestling still around anywhere.

David Stevely, Lanarkshire, Scotland

We've had a truly remarkable range of letters this month asking for information on all manner of wrestling games – which means that we're either the victims of an enormous post-April fool wind-up, or that there's still a great deal of interest in what used to be TV's favourite sport. Anyway, back to the question... after a quiet period of roughly three years, Konami is considering once again dipping its toe into the waters of software development, so the game in question may yet appear on the company's own label – we'll keep you posted.

OVER THE RAINBOW

Dear Sir,

Am I the only person who paid 25 and who feels that Rainbow Islands, an ST port-over, is over-rated. As you might have ascertained, I am an Amiga owner, after all few ST owners pay more than 20 for an arcade game: they don't have to.

I'm no Amiga fan – it's just a heap of plastic to me – but it would be nice if programmers could stretch themselves with full-screen or 32-colour games.

Islands is, after all, a vertical scroller, yet the play area is in 'letter-box' format – you have little or no warning of falling objects. The gameplay is minimalist, though unusual, and I did take the trouble of playing it intensively just to see if there was anything more to it than jumping about. There wasn't.

I reached the end of 'robot world' (after two days) only to die at the guardian stage. Nevertheless I had four credits remaining: this proved pointless however, as I was unceremoniously dumped back to the beginning. What was the idea of the credit system then: at least Silkworm (which I finished on my own without cheating) puts you back to a certain level part-way through.

I am extremely disappointed to say the least, and will go back to more interesting games (RPGs/wargames). I know that it was my fault: so can I warn other readers not to be taken in by hype and (to me, now slightly suspect) reviewers.

J Temple, Colchester

Each to their own. You don't like Rainbow Islands – fine. But your comment on the ST/Amiga port–over business is silly. The reasons have been covered before in considerable depth (see BackSpace, Issue Eleven), but suffice it to say Rainbow Islands is a coin-op conversion, and seeing as the coin-op makes effective use of 16 colours, there's no need to add any more. As for the continue feature... not being able to continue after Island Five is a feature of the coin-op to prevent players from 'buying' their way straight to the end. You should have seen the message to this effect displayed following your demise. There is a lot more to Rainbow Islands than jumping about. It takes time to find out that there's more than one way to complete it, and in doing so its many special features are revealed.

STARTING OUT

Dear Sir,

After deciding that I was going to buy an Amiga I realised that I could do with some advice on starting my software collection. I thought that you could help me by giving me some advice on which games to choose. So could you give me the names of a few games which are addictive but fun in each of the following categories: arcade, simulation (flight and driving), beat 'em up, platform games and strategy? Thanks very much.

Ben Stewart, Therfield, Hertfordshire

A quick shout around the office resulted in the following consensus on recommended games. Arcade: Anco's ***Kick Off****; Simulation (flight): Electronic Arts'* ***F/A-18 Interceptor****; Simulation (driving): MicroStyle's* ***Stunt Car Racer****; Beat 'em up: System 3's* ***IK+****; Platform: Ocean's* ***Rainbow Islands****; Strategy: EA's* ***Populous****. It's funny really, we never really agree on anything in this office, but most of these choices were actually unanimous. What better recommendation than that.*

IIIIIT'S SHOWTIME

Dear Sir,

I've noticed in the last few issues that rubbishy European Computer Entertainment Show advert. I'd just like to ask you – who is it open to?

Is it just open for software companies to show off new software to computer stockists and magazines, or is it open to anyone? If the latter is the case, do you have to get tickets or can you just turn up? If you do have to have tickets where would you obtain them?

Nicholas Chaddock, Tadcaster, North Yorkshire

We showed this letter to our marketing manager, Dean Barrett, who had this to say: Come on, the advert's not that bad! Anyway, the exhibition is open to the public on the Saturday and Sunday September 15th and 16th, and tickets will be available within the next four to six weeks (you can pay at the door, but it's advisable to get your ticket in advance to avoid the inevitable queues). There'll be a large number of interactive exhibits on show, a central arena with hourly activities on the stage and a whole host of games-playing celebrities – there's also a good chance of Saturday morning's events being televised. Every major software publisher is attending, so get along – it's going to be the event of the year!

THE LEISURE PRINCIPLE

Dear Sir,

I have noticed the adverts for a new magazine running under the name PC Leisure in recent issues. As my subscription to The One ends in July, I am debating as to whether I should switch or stay with The One. If you could please inform me of PC Leisure's address and any information on the magazine. I trust your views and opinions on PC Leisure will not be biased!

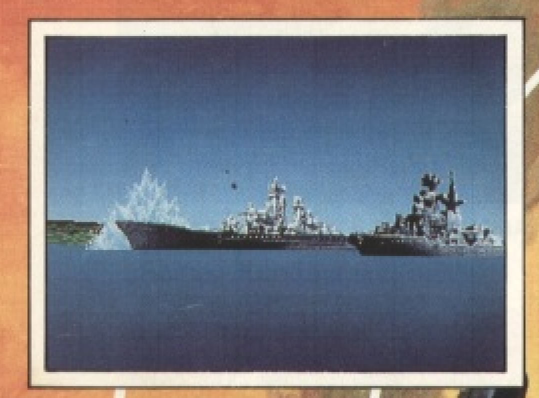
Nomi Rehman, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Of course our views are biased – we love it! PC Leisure is in many ways the fruit of our own creative loins: in fact, The One's entire staff works on it to some degree. In answer to your main question, PC Leisure covers all manner of entertainment using the MS–DOS machines, while The One concentrates solely on getting the most out of games. So you might as well buy them both.

688 ATTACK SUB









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Screenshots represent IBM version, we think the Amiga version looks even better!

ELECTRONIC ARTS™

SINGIN' THE BLUTH

Don Bluth, the force behind the ground-breaking Laser Disc arcade games Dragon's Lair and Space Ace, returns to your small and silver screens with All Dogs Go To Heaven, a classic cartoon tale of good versus evil.

The film, produced by Sullivan Bluth Studios, recently opened in the West End and is tipped to follow in the lucrative footsteps of Bluth's previous full-length animated feature films, **An American Tail** and **The Land Before Time** (both produced in collaboration with Steven Spielberg).

All Dogs Go To Heaven: The Game was produced by Merit Software and comprises 10 arcade sequences loosely based on the film's plot, with the gap between each filled by a short narrative to complement the cinematic roots.

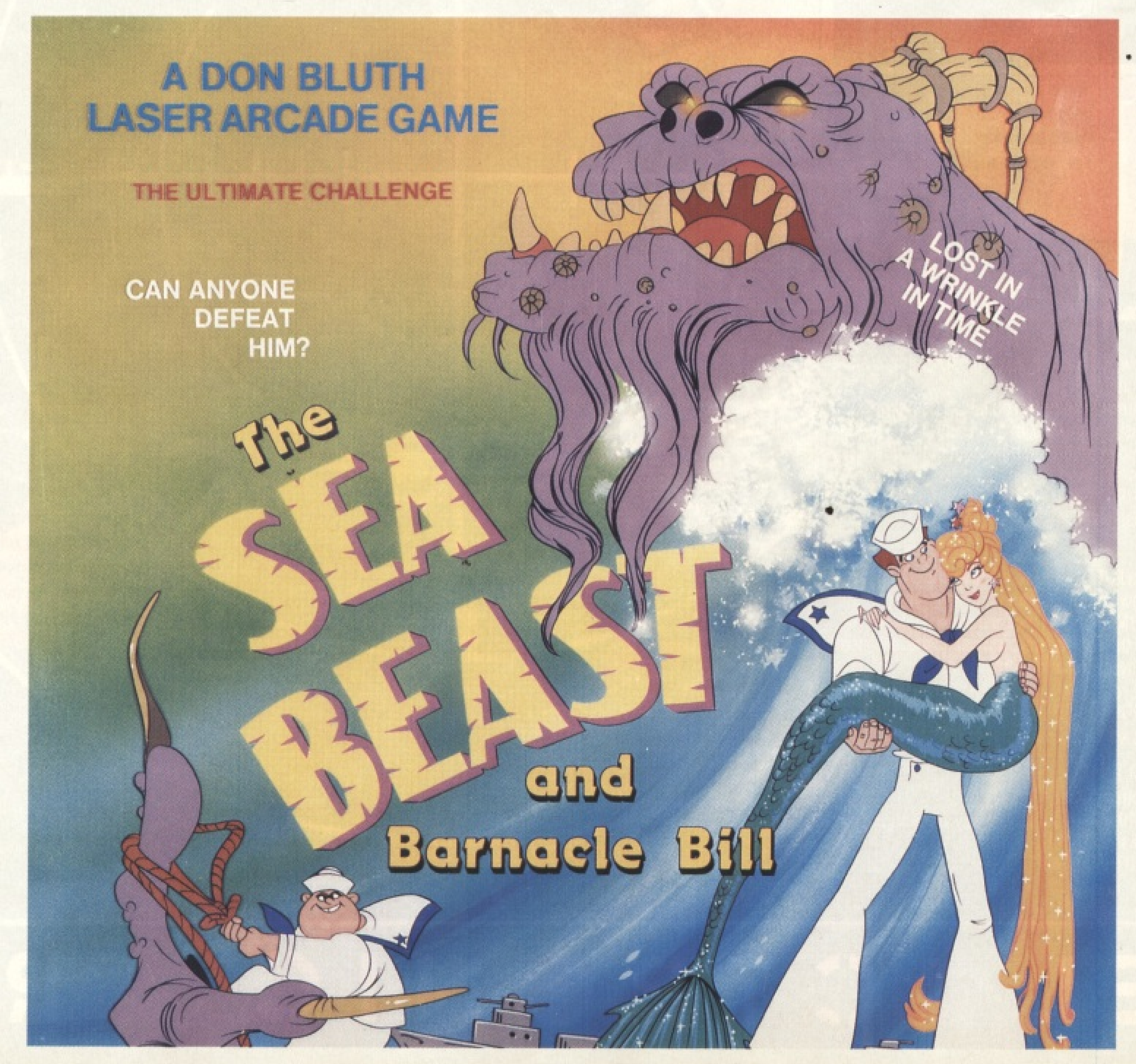
All well and good. But there's even better news. The illustrious Studio is moving back into software production – this time on the home front. Currently in the pipeline are three sequels, namely **Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp**, **Dragon's Lair: The Legend**, and **Space Ace II: Borf's Revenge** – plus an original venture: **The Sea Beast And Barnacle Bill**, which was originally intended to be released on Laser Disc all those years ago but never quite made it.

Readysoft, the team behind the latest Dirk venture, **Escape From Singe's Castle**, is handling the programming of Dragon's Lair: Time Warp. The other wares will be handled by Sullivan Bluth's newly-created 'in-house' team, which will utilise its extensive animated feature film production facilities. All four games promise improved playability over their best-selling predecessors.

Incidentally, there's also the possibility of full-length animated feature films loosely based on Dirk's early Laser Disc adventures.

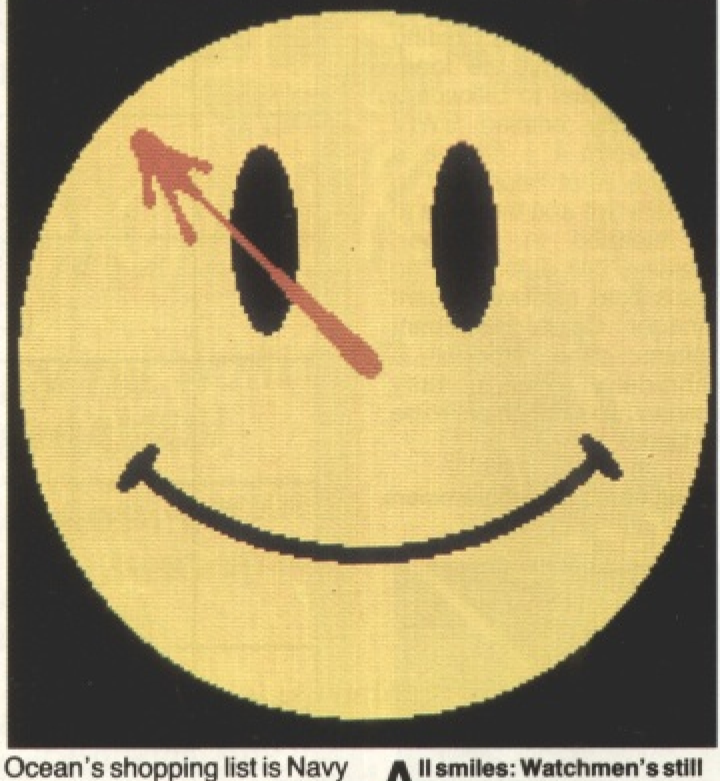


▲Forthcoming attractions from Sullivan Bluth: The Sea Beast And Barnacle Bill and Dragon's Lair: Time Warp.



OCEAN SWELLS

AS IF Ocean hadn't already got more than enough irons in the fire, bread on the water, fingers in pies and birds in the bush, the Manchester monster has just snapped up yet another batch of big-name licences – with a smattering of original product to provide some variety.



Perhaps the 'biggest' of these acquisitions is Arnold Schwarzenegger's new movie Total Recall (first mentioned way back in Issue Six) which sees our Arnie in what is reputedly one of his more serious roles as a gun-toting special agent of the future. The movie's got an impressive list of credits behind it, including the producers of Rambo III and the writer of the original Alien – and perhaps most impressively, Director Paul Verhoeven with his first film since RoboCop.

And speaking of RoboCop, you can expect to see the sequel sometime around Christmas (imaginatively titled RoboCop II and already signed up by Ocean) which reputedly sees the metal-clad rozzer battling it out with a rival RoboCop called Kong, which has been designed by OCP to replace him. Shock horror!

But possibly the most hush-hush of all the items on Ocean's shopping list is Navy Seals – it's so secret, not even the Director knows what it's about (well, not quite). All that's known is that it's based around the US Navy's Elite SAL squadron (the SAL bit stands for Sea Air and Land) and stars Tom Cruise – it's probably some kind of a watery Top Gun, but seeing as Ocean isn't even sure when the movie's due to be released, you can understand why details are sketchier than Bill Tidy's old school books.

As for Watchmen (which was exclusively revealed by The One last May), it looks as though both Terry Gilliam's film and Ocean's game have

All smiles: Watchmen's still in the sidelines...

been put on hold – it doesn't look like we'll be seeing either the cinematic or the 16-bit interpretations of Alan Moore's classic graphic novel this year.

In a more original (and immediate) vein, there's a very good chance of the 16-bit versions of Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's classic 8-bit arcade adventure Head Over Heels appearing before the year is out. Heralded as one of the greatest 8-bit games of all time, it was converted to the ST some time ago, but has since done little more than gather dust in Ocean's offices. But now at last it's under serious consideration for release – the only problem is, Ocean isn't quite sure what to do with it. It may yet appear at a budget price, as part of a compilation or as a full-price title. It's for Ocean to decide...

Finally there's the latest offering from Digital Image Design, the team behind F-29 Retaliator. It's a 3D filled-vector shoot 'em-up that's currently being developed under the working title of Epic, but it's already been seen briefly as Goldrunner 3D (The reason for this is it started life as a Microdeal title, but Ocean snapped it up when the company moved out of games software).





They're that hard – RoboCop and Arnie back in action.

TOP TEN

(Month Ending March 1990)

AMIGA

1	(NE)	TV SPORTS BASKETBALL (Cinemaware/Mirrorsoft)
2	(NE)	PLAYER MANAGER (Anco)
3	(NE)	X-OUT (Rainbow Arts)
4	(NE)	MANCHESTER UNITED (Krisalis)
5	(RE)	WESTERN EUROPE SCENERY (SubLogic)
6	(3)	RAINBOW ISLANDS (Ocean)
7	(NE)	INFESTATION (Psygnosis)
8	(1)	FIGHTER BOMBER (Activision)
9	(NE)	DRAGON'S BREATH (Palace)
10	(NE)	PINBALL MAGIC (Loriciels)

Compiled exclusively for The One by Software Circus Ltd, The Plaza on Oxford Street, 120 Oxford Street, LONDON W1N 9DP. Tel: (01) 436 2811.



TV Sports Basketball bounces straight in to Number One.

NEWS

UPWARD CURVE

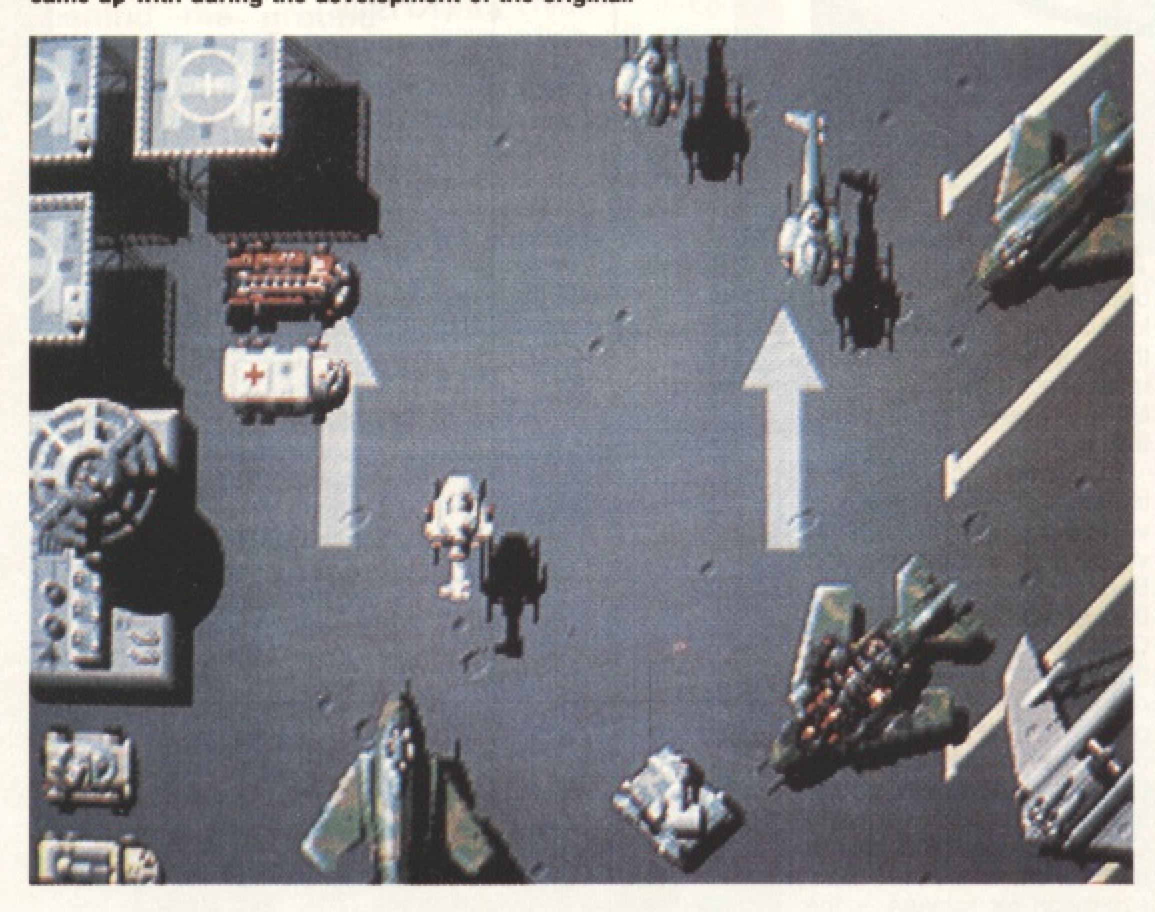
THE SALES Curve, the company behind the successful conversions of Silkworm and Ninja Warriors, is leaving behind its year-old sales and marketing deal with Virgin Mastertronic to release all of its future coin-op conversions on its own label.

The first title to appear on the as-yet untitled label will be Jaleco's Saint Dragon which is pencilled in for September. The mythical shoot 'em up is currently being converted by John Croudy, who was previously responsible for the ST versions of Silkworm and Ninja Warriors.

The programmer responsible for the Amiga versions of the same two coin-op conversions, Ronald Pieket Weserrik, is currently developing the label's second release, which is also its first original product.

But possibly most exciting is the news that the long-awaited sequel to Silkworm, provisionally entitled SWIV (or Silkworm 4 – no-one is quit sure what happened to numbers two and three), is to be released in October. However, this date is by no means fixed, as development manager Daniel Marchant explains: "the product is technically exceptionally complex, so it may have to be put back."

Silkworm: the sequel, SWIV, is set to include a number of features and ideas which the programmers came up with during the development of the original.



CORE GOES IT ALONE

CORE Design, the team responsible for the development of Rick Dangerous, Switchblade and Axel's Magic Hammer among many others has made the bold transition from development team to independent software publisher – and the first game to come from the newly-formed company is already warming up on the sidelines.

And while the name Core Design stays the same, the formation of the new company means that Core will not be working as a third-party developer for other companies any more – all of the team's new games will be released under the Core Design label. But Core will finish work on Monty Python's Flying Circus for Virgin and Rick Dangerous II for MicroProse (both of which are still under development) before it chops off its freelance arm.

The first game to appear on the new label is currently being developed by Kevin Bulmer under the working title of Derelict – it's a '3D multi-vector thing' in the words of Core's newly-appointed Marketing Manager Richard Barclay. You can expect to see Derelict appear sometime later on this year, but Core's plans beyond that are still undecided. It's all a matter of time...

TOP TEN

(Month Ending March 1990)

ATARI ST

1	(NE)	MIDWINTER (Rainbird)
2	(2)	ULTIMA V (Origin)
3	(9)	RAINBOW ISLANDS (Ocean)
4	(NE)	X-OUT (Rainbow Arts)
5	(NE)	JACK NICKLAUS GOLF (Accolade)
6	(NE)	PLAYER MANAGER (Anco)
7	(NE)	WAYNE GRETZKY HOCKEY (Bethesda Softworks)
8	(NE)	STARFLIGHT (Electronic Arts)
9	(NE)	PINBALL MAGIC (Loriciels)
10	(RE)	SUPER CARS (Gremlin)

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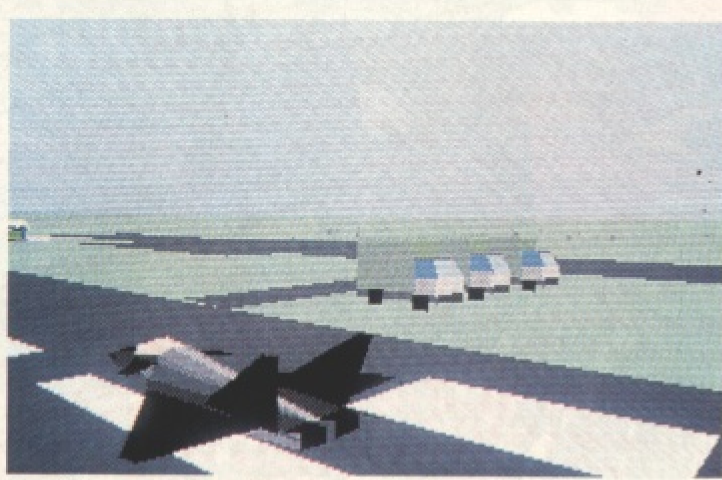



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Bzzz. 'crackle'. hizz. pop: This is Radio S.M.O.G. bringing you the latest update.
"We join our heroes on the surface of Planet X where a rescue mission is in progress. The REPTILONS have enslaved the humans stationed there. They are being forced to create an evil Robot Army destined to DESTROY THE EARTH! Listen out for our next broadcast"
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Published by Domark Ltd, Ferry House, 51-57 Lacy Road, London SW15 1PR Tel: 01-780 2224 Atari ST & Amiga Screenshots

NEWS

RETALIATOR — AT LAST!

WELL, it's been a long time coming – it was reviewed in The One no less than five months ago and has since been subject to constant delays – but at last it's here. Ocean's F-29 Retaliator is now actually IN THE SHOPS (well at least it is on the Amiga – the ST version won't be ready for around another month).



Retaliator off the runway at last.

Rumour has it that there's to be a mass charity benefit gig at Wembley Stadium next month to be broadcast to 150 countries and attended by Retaliator itself to celebrate this monumental release of the long-suffering game!

Well, maybe it's not quite as monumental as that. But there is some cause for celebration, and so Ocean is offering three Ocean Amiga games of the winner's choice to the first person to photograph or describe the final screen from the European Battleground (after the final War Update). Send your picture or description to Retaliator Race, The One, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU, and don't forget to tell us your choice of games.

THOUSAND YEAR REICH

HAVING broken away from its educational-specialist parent company, Logotron Entertainment is to consolidate its rebirth as a purely leisure orientated firm with the launch of a new label, Millennium.

The first two products from the new label – Kid Gloves and Cloud Kingdoms – are already on sale, but future product is already lined up to take the company through to the end of the year.

First to hit the streets will be Steve Bak's conversion of his own 8-bit platform classic Hercules (see BackSpace, Issue 19). Essentially, it will be the same game with new graphics, the most notably different being the star: the eight-foot tall muscle-rippled hero of the original has suffered some strange side-effects in the process of conversion and is now a girl!

Steve's also working on an original venture, provisionally entitled Guppy, where you control a fish of awesome powers. Apparently, among other features, the gameplay will have you blowing bubbles at enemies and controlling a rotating oyster.

And while we're on the subject of 8-bit classics, does anyone remember Druid? The man behind it, Dene Carter, gave us Dragon's Breath (through Palace) before he left these shores to work for Beam Software in Australia. Before he left however, he delivered Druid: The Darker Depths – an update which will feature more levels than the original, with extra adversaries and some devilish new traps. Conversion to 16-bit is underway, and something should surface around early Autumn.

Still with Millennium, there are some spooky goings-on down their parts. In particular, a product called Haunted House. Written by Stuart Gregg (who converted Rick Dangerous to the PC for Core Design before moving to Archipelagos developer, Astral), this features five levels of scrolling platform action in a traditional mould, but with some devious twists. Core chap Kevin Bulmer is providing the graphics and you can expect to sample the fruits of their labour towards the end of this year.

Floating on our Millennium's Cloud Kingdoms



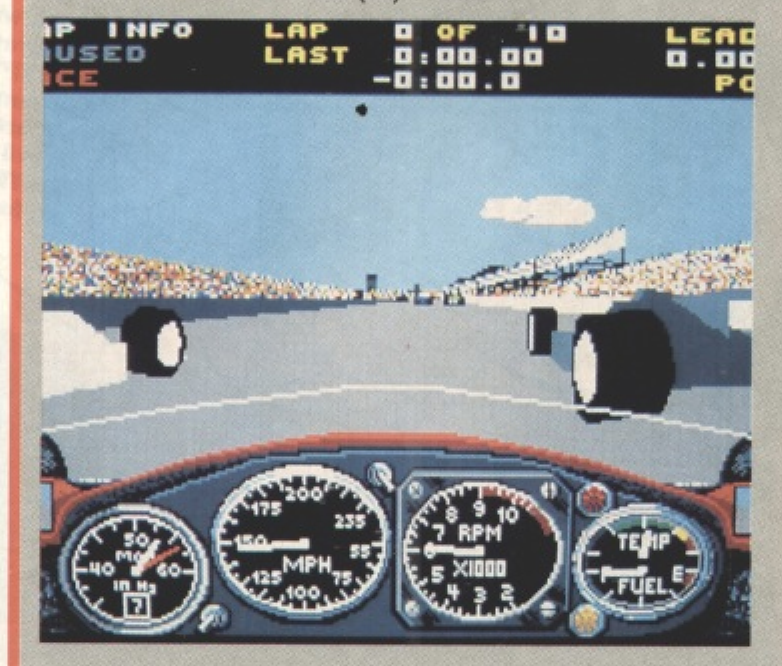
TOP TEN

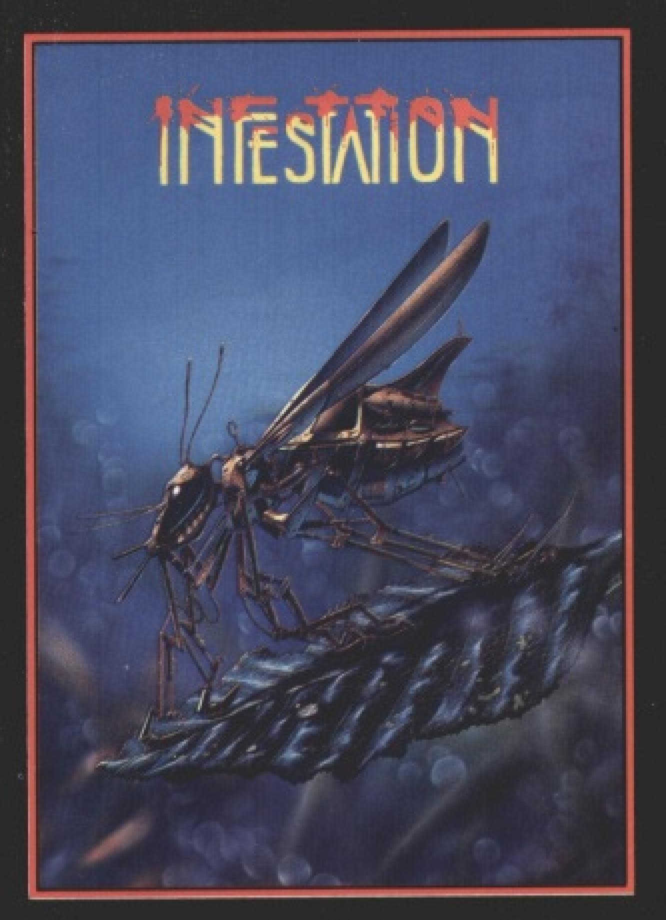
(Month Ending April 1990)

PC

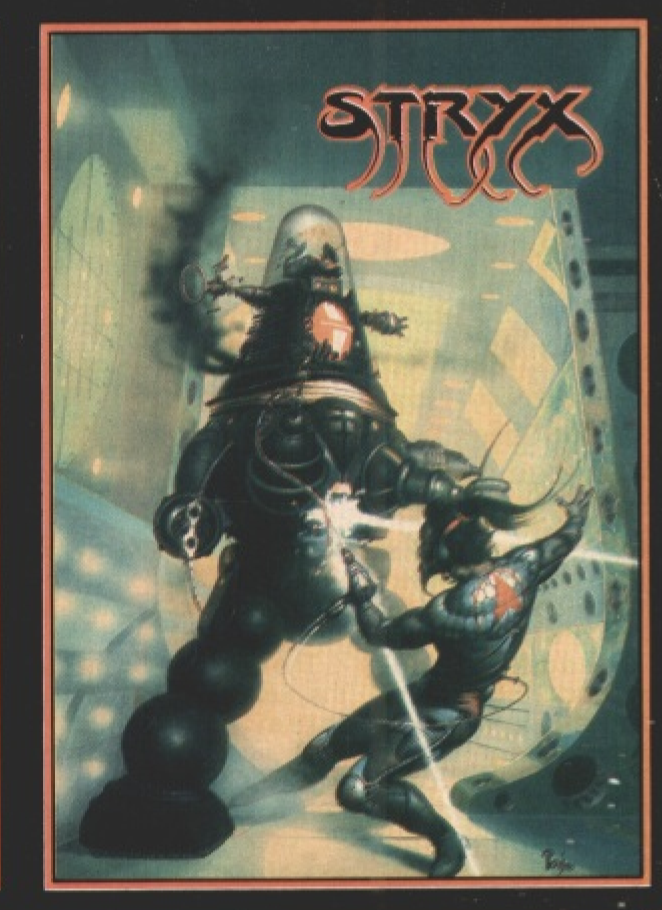
1	(2)	FLIGHT SIMULATOR V4.0 (Microsoft)
2	(1)	CHESSMASTER 2100 (Mindscape)
3	(NE)	CODENAME: ICEMAN (Sierra/Activision)
4	(NE)	RISK (Leisure Genius)
5	(NE)	A-10 TANK KILLER (Dynamix/Activision)
6	(RE)	WESTERN EUROPE SCENERY (SubLogic)
7	(3)	INDIANAPOLIS 500 (Electronic Arts)
8	(4)	688 ATTACK SUB (Elecronic Arts)
9	(NE)	MECH WARRIOR (Infocom/Activision)
10	(RE)	JACK NICKLAUS GOLF (Accolade)

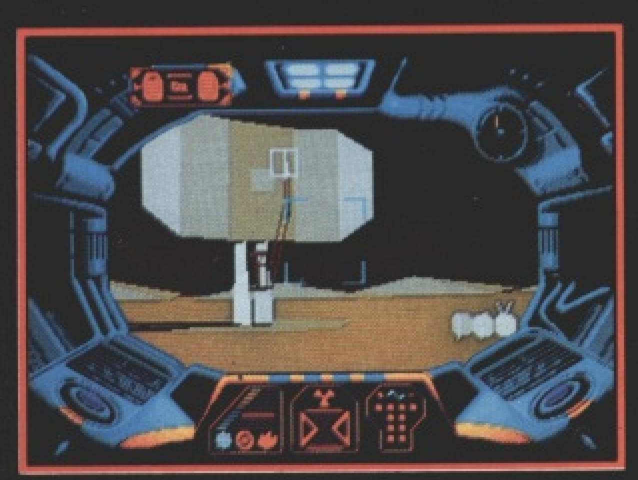
Compiled exclusively for The One by Software Circus Ltd, The Plaza on Oxford Street, 120 Oxford Street, LONDON W1N 9DP. Tel: (01) 436 2811.



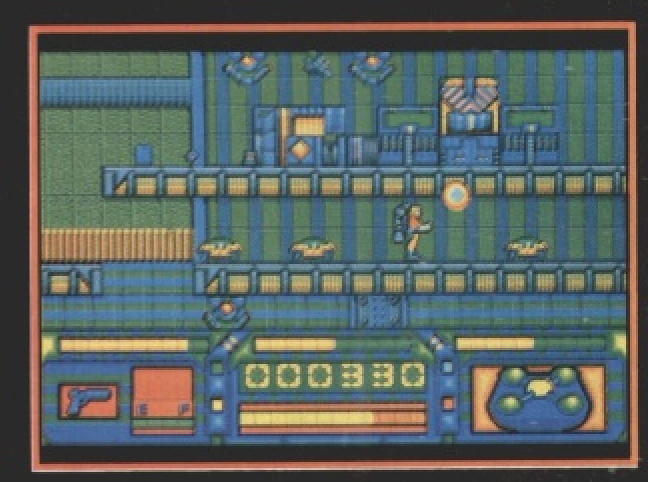












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GAMES PEOPLE PLAY



HEWSON HAS A BALL

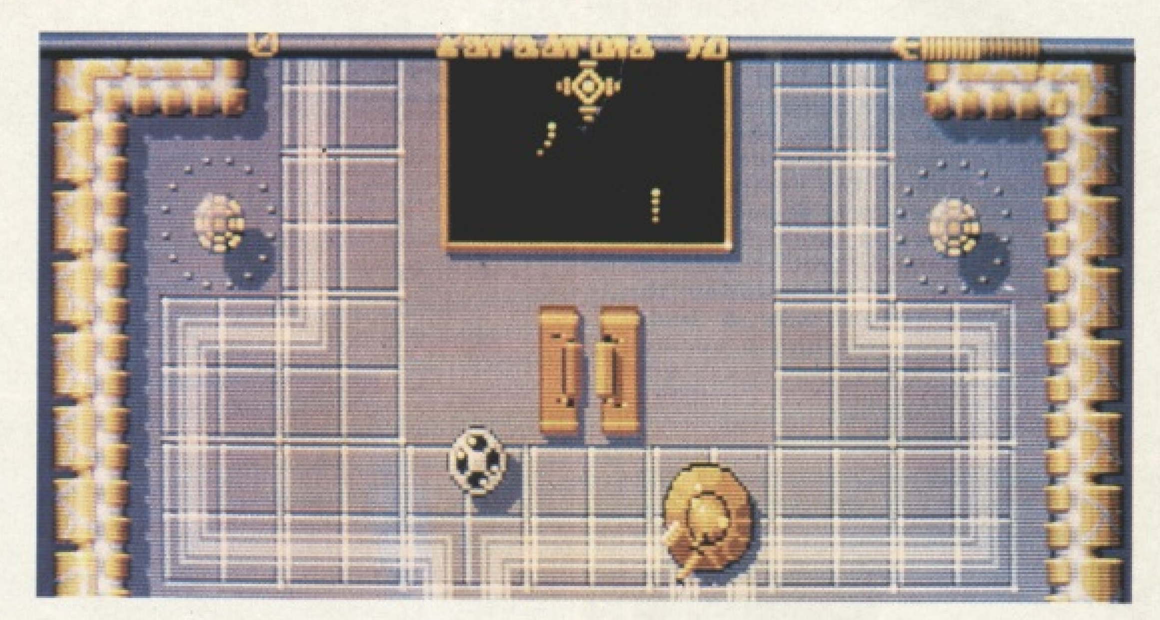
AFTER a period of relative silence, Hewson has four titles lined up for release over the summer months.

First up is Future Basketball, a simulation of America's favourite indoor sport in the 21st Century with more than a few Speedball-esque elements, including no-holds-barred rules and a host of extra weaponry to get to grips with. Future Basketball is set for release on ST and Amiga this June – both at a price of £19.99.

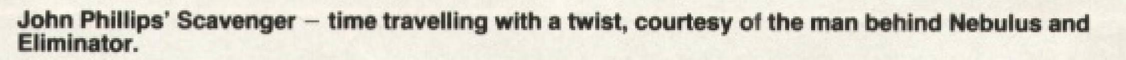
Following that will come the sequel to one of Hewson's most successful games to date. Nebulus 2 is currently under development at the offices of Infernal Byte Systems, and as Hewson puts it, is being developed in collaboration with the original author John Phillips (which doesn't actually amount to a whole lot as to date John's had very little input – in fact he's not even seen the game yet!). There's oodles more tower-toppling fun promised on the planet Nor, with arcade relief provided this time in the form of helicopter-based subsections.

The onset of Summer sees the arrival of John Phillips' latest meisterwork, Scavenger, which the man himself describes as: "a 3D horizontally-scrolling Ghosts 'n' Goblins type thing with puzzle elements." John's had one or two problems during the game's development, including having to totally rewrite it as the original vertically-scrolling version just wasn't working (and as if that wasn't enough, the graphic artist broke his hand) but everything's on course now for the August release.

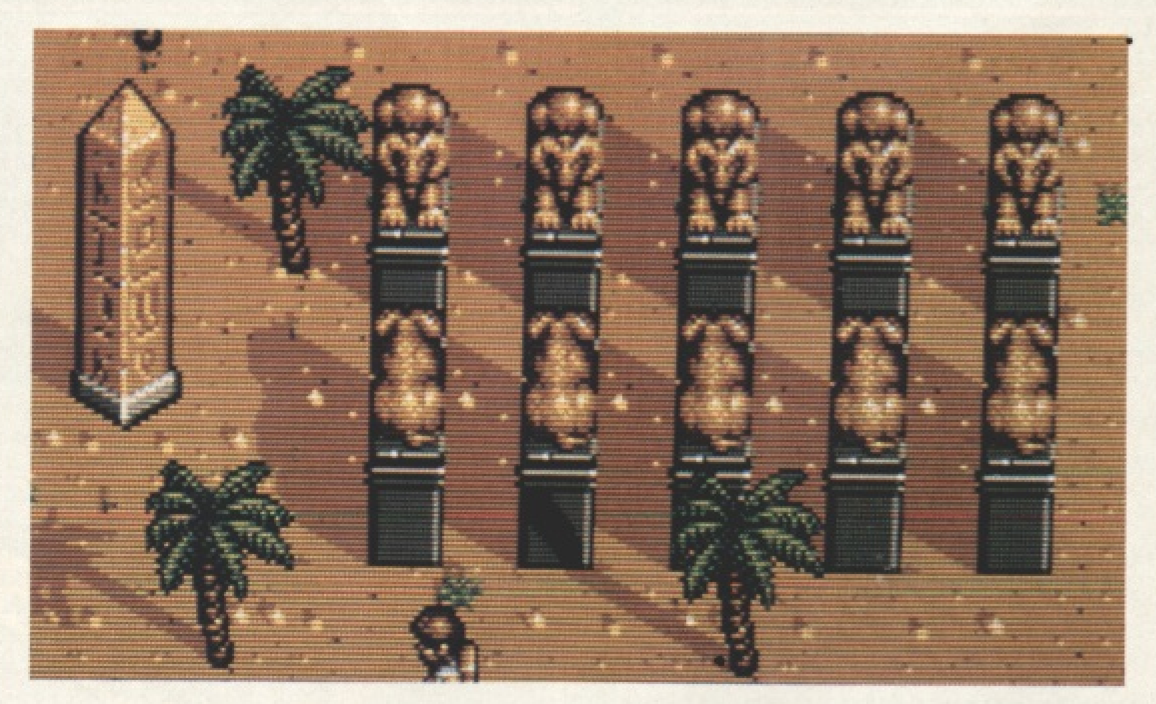
Finally there's Andrew Braybrook's long-awaited Paradroid 90. Since the Work In Progress in Issue Fifteen, Andrew's made a number of changes – the most drastic of which being on the Amiga version, where the playing area is to be cut down to vertical scrolling only, like its ST counterpart. "I don't think it infringes on the gameplay too much – I'm quite confident that it works, but if people don't like it I'll change it," says Andrew. With the ST version more or less finished and the Amiga version coming along nicely, Andrew's confident that everything will be finished in time for the September release.

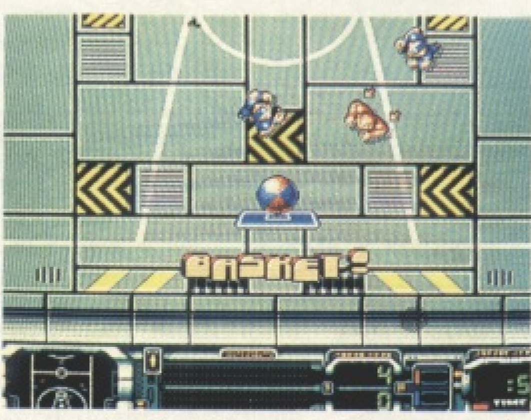


Andrew Braybrook's Paradroid 90 – the follow-up to one of the greatest 8-bit games of all time is nearing completion, with more weapons and adversaries than ever before.



John Phillips' Scavenger – time travelling with a twist, courtesy of the man behind Nebulus and Eliminator.



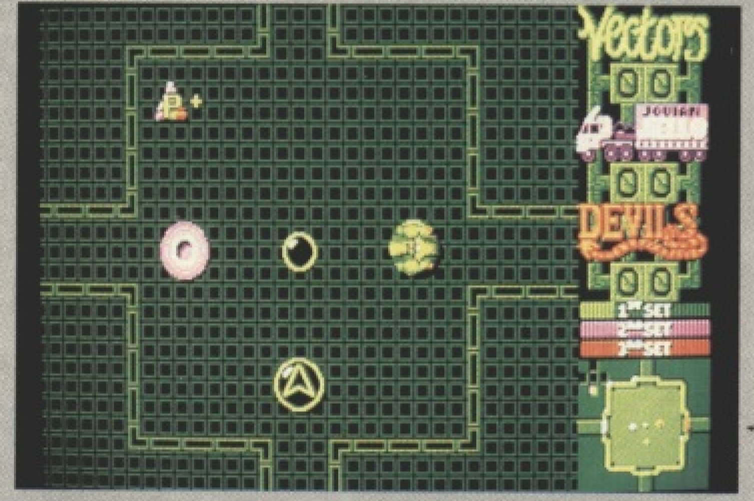


Two points! The Harlem Globetrotters meet James Caan in Hewson's Future Basketball.



Pogo bounces back in Nebulus 2 – twice the tower-toppling fun.

GOODBYE TRIBAL, HELLO PROJECTYLE



Projectyle – or is it Tribal... or Scrollaball... or Frantic?

ONE OF the biggest problems attached to reviewing games is that you can never be sure that the name that's on the disk you receive will be the name on the box when the game is eventually released.

Electronic Arts is one of the greatest offenders in this respect: Populous was called Creation when we first caught sight of it, for example. And now EA has done it again, this time with its three-way ball game which appears in our Work In Progress section (page 90) with the moniker Tribal.

This one seems to be harder than most to put a name to – it started life as Frantic, then it became Scrollaball, then Tribal and now... it's Projectyle. What next, we wonder?

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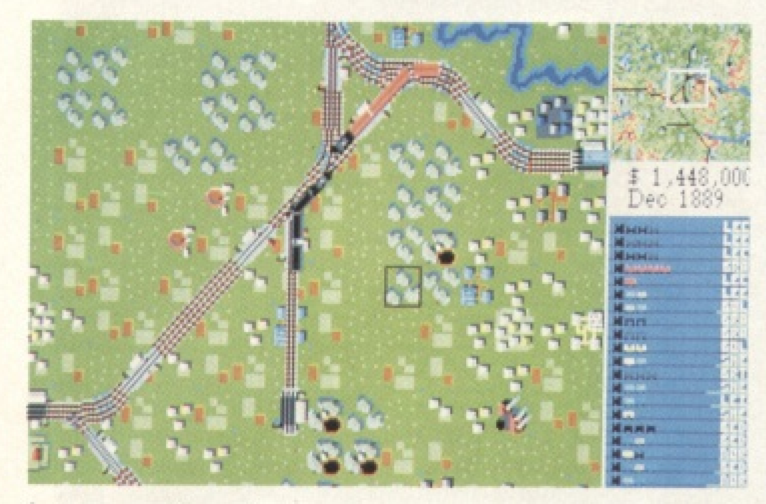
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NEWS

MICROPROSE BACK ON TRACK



Just as good as the rail thing? You'll be well chuffed with Microprose's Railroad Tycoon.

WITH tank, fighter plane, and submarine simulations practically coming out of MicroProse's ears, the firm's latest addition to the genre is more than a little off the beaten track – but firmly fixed on an iron one.

Swapping chain guns and sidewinder missiles for whistles and signal boxes, Railroad Tycoon claims to be the first simulation of its type, taking you back to the golden age of steam and casting you as a would-be railway entrepreneur.

Starting off in the early 1800s with just a few coppers to your name, your objective is to build up a railway empire which spans the country, connecting towns, cities, ports and harbours – a bit like a SimCity for trains.

Designed by Sid Meier (the man behind F-19 Stealth Fighter and Red Storm Rising amongst others), Railroad Tycoon is set to appear on the PC this month, with ST and Amiga versions following later in the year.

In a more familiar military vein, you can expect to see the Amiga and ST versions of M1 Tank Platoon appearing at the end of the year, along with the PC version of Silent Service II, the sequel to the famous WWII submarine simulation.

This time around we're promised a greater range of missions set in the South Pacific Ocean (including one which puts you up against Japan's Shinano, the largest aircraft carrier in WWII) and also the option to switch sides, to play a German U-Boat commander with the objective of knocking out Allied shipping in the North Atlantic.

But if automated destruction is not really your style, you can indulge in a spot of good old-fashioned violence – with the added boon of being able to call it art after you've just kicked someone's teeth out. The long-awaited beat 'em up extravaganza Oriental Games is at last ready for release, with you up against 24 pyjama-clad warriors in your quest for the title of Grand Master. Both ST and Amiga versions should hit the streets next month at £24.99 apiece, with the PC following shortly after at the same price.

MicroProse's M1 Tank Platoon is tops on the PC, but will the 16-bit conversions be a barrel of laughs too?

Block or get your block knocked off – Firebird's Oriental Games.



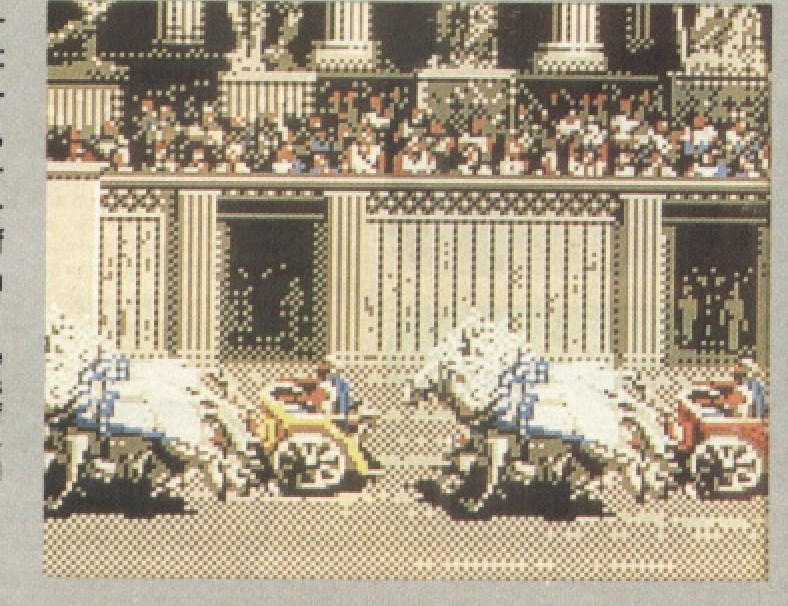
BUILD ROME IN A DAY

SEND barbarians to the lions, wipe out enemy armies, stuff your face, take hot baths and wear a big sheet – all in the comfort of your own home. Electronic Arts' latest strategy extravaganza Centurion: Defender Of Rome promises all this and more, placing you in the sandals of a Roman legionnaire with the task of spreading the Roman empire.

Strategy is the order of the day, as you command battles and oversee the expansion of your empire, with action provided by gladiator battles and the goings-on in the Circus Maximus, where the chariot races are run to decide just who's the baddest dude in Rome.

Expect to see Centurion: Defender Of Rome on the PC in June at a price of £24.99 – ST and Amiga versions should follow later in the year.

Electronic Arts' Centurion: Defender Of Rome. Can you rule the world's greatest empire and still look good in a white sheet? Here's your chance to find out...



NEWS

WEALLY TEWIFFIC

SOUTH London's prestigious Kensington Roof Gardens was once more shaken to its very foundations last month as EMAP's annual Golden Joysticks were doled out to acknowledge the best of last year's software. The awards were handed out by Jonathan Ross (who's quite a games buff himself – but more of that later).

The complete roll of honour is as follows:



Jonathon Ross, nice awards – shame about the suit.

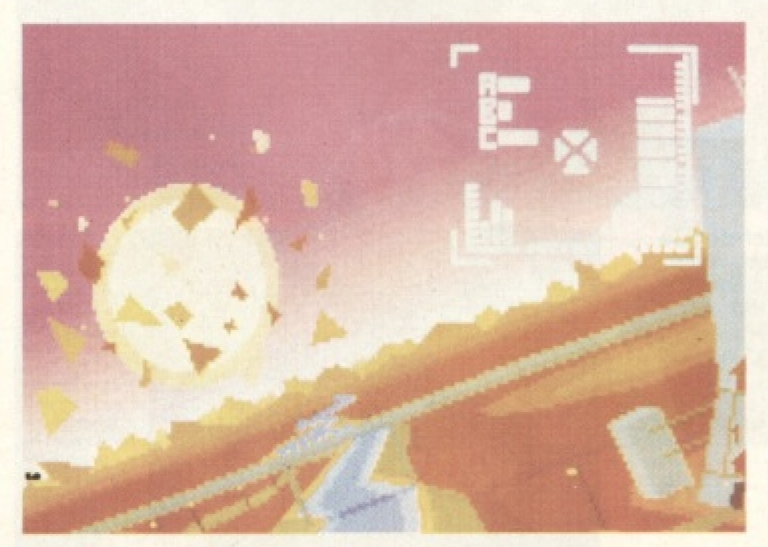
GAME OF THE YEAR: Kick Off (Anco)
SOFTWARE HOUSE OF THE YEAR: Ocean
BEST GRAPHICS: Shadow Of The Beast (Psygnosis)
BEST SOUNDTRACK: Future Wars (Palace/ Delphine)
BEST SIMULATION: M1 Tank Platoon (MicroProse)
PC PRODUCT OF THE YEAR: Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade: The Graphic Adventure (US Gold/ Lucasfilm)
BEST COIN-OP CONVERSION: Hard Drivin' (Domark)
MOST ORIGINAL GAME: Populous (Electronic Arts)

SO LONG SUCKERS

WATCH out, Bullfrog's about, you'd better watch out, 'cos Bullfrog's about... In case you hadn't already guessed (and quite a lot of you did), the 'Best Game Ever' story that was splattered all over last month's news pages was in fact an April Fool.

Let's clear this up now – CyberAssault 556 is NOT real – at least not yet. The rather astounding visuals you saw were produced especially for The One by Bullfrog's graphics genius Simon Hunter (see Grafix, page 94) on Dpaint II Enhanced on the PC using MCGA-256 colour mode. And they must have been pretty convincing, as a certain magazine publisher was straight on the phone to Electronic Arts after seeing the article to tie up the exclusive review! Gotcha...

CyberAssault 556: sorry guys, only joking.



Killin

Vektor Grafix, the brains behind Star Wars, Empire Strikes Back and Fighter Bomber, is turning 3D into an art form. Kati Hamza visited the company's plush Leeds offices to see how.

When Vektor Grafix first began life back in 1987, it was a two-man operation with a couple of vector line routines under its belt. Now, three years and three successful titles later, it boasts 16 staff members, spacious offices in the heart of Leeds and a highly sophisticated 3D graphics system.

There's even a second off-shoot company, set up in conjunction with Realtime (originators of Carrier Command) to market Snasm, a cross-assembler they developed in tandem and which is now used by such big names as the Bitmap Brothers, Psygnosis and Graftgold.

However, of the founding duo, Andy Craven and Dan Gallagher, only Craven remains. Gallagher left after about a year to pursue other projects – notably Ocean's Voyager and Psygnosis' Infestation. The company is now solely in Andy Craven's capable hands.

So, following the success of Star Wars, Empire Strikes Back and Fighter Bomber (on six formats), what exactly are the boys up to now? The final version of Bomber (for the Amstrad) is currently being finished off, the team's just completed the modifications for the American versions (called Strike Ace), and 16-bit Bomber mission disks went off to Activision recently. These don't just feature 16 extra missions either – the Amiga and PC versions should sport plenty of interesting new graphics as well.

Work is in progress on several products for various publishers, but they're all in the early stages and still extremely hush-hush. However, one project they can open up about is Image Works' forthcoming Killing Cloud – a story of toxic pollution.

THE STORY SO FAR . . .

The dawn mist that descends every morning over San Francisco has somehow become toxic. Civilised life continues but only above the level of the poisonous mist. Meanwhile, crime is escalating deep inside the cloud, orchestrated by a triad of criminals – the Trinity.

As a rookie policeman on his first case, it's your job to capture sufficient members of the gang to provide you with enough information to get your hands on one of the big three. This in turn should give you enough leads to get to the remaining duo and investigate the cloud's source. The disintegrating ruins of the former island prison, Alcatraz, play a mysterious part in all of this – but finding out exactly what that part is your first job.

The arcade sections mark a departure from Fighter Bomber which was definitely a flight simulator in the purest sense. Vektor thinks of Killing Cloud as a game which just happens to have a 3D flight section rather than a product in which the 3D is the be-all and end-all. In fact, that's definitely the direction in which Andy Craven thinks the 3D market should be heading: A lot of 3D games are all about technology for technology's sake which is unfortunately still demanded of you. In the States now, 3D is deemed as a tool that you use in a game rather than 'the game' and I think's that how we're going to go over here.

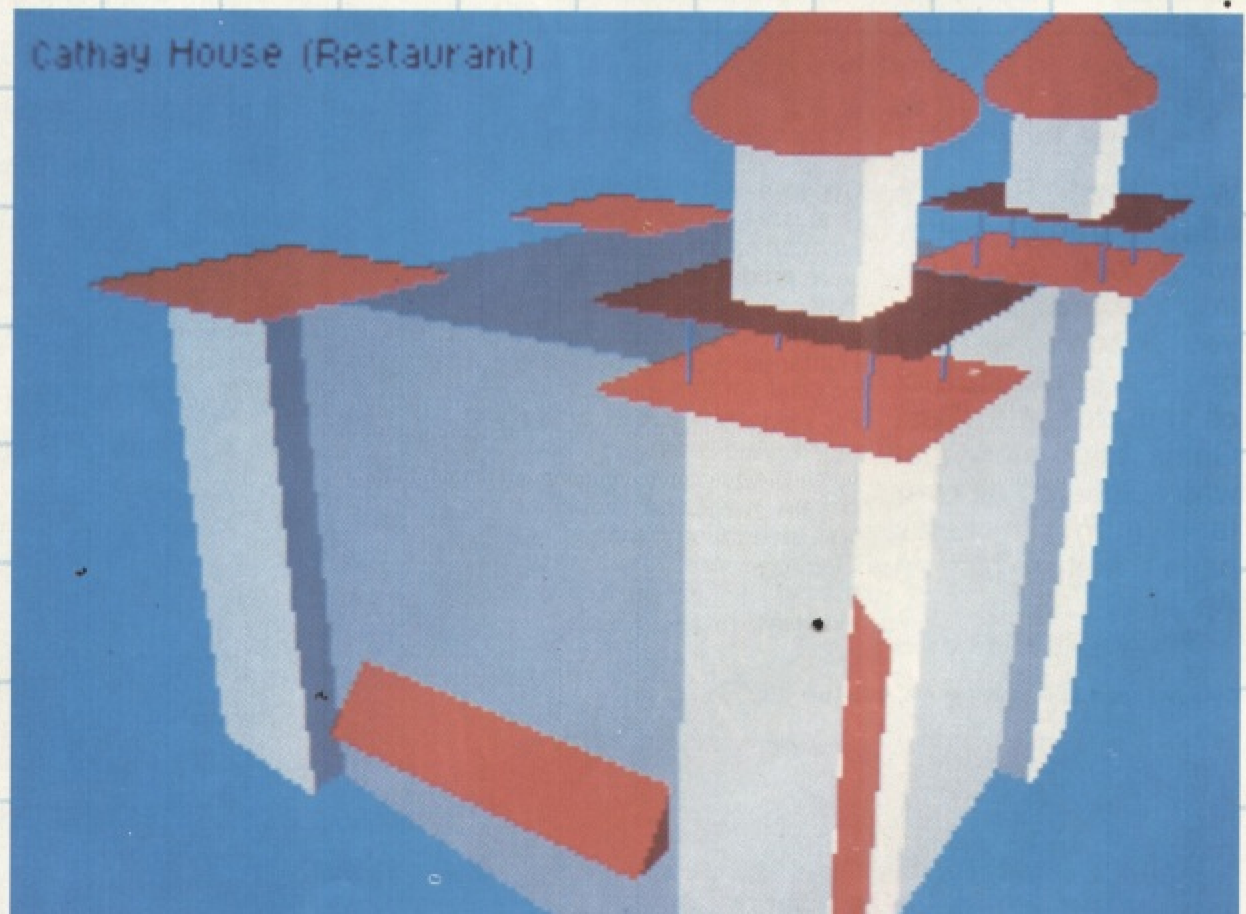
Not that Killing Cloud just makes use of any old



Killing Cloud's graphics are put together in two stages: 3D objects, like this parking meter, are designed manually and then downloaded into the game mapper, a powerful mathematical tool which builds up the 3D environment proper. Derrick Austin's the man in charge of object design and all his creations tart their life on paper: "If you need to go back and change something later on, it can cause problems if you don't have all the data written down."

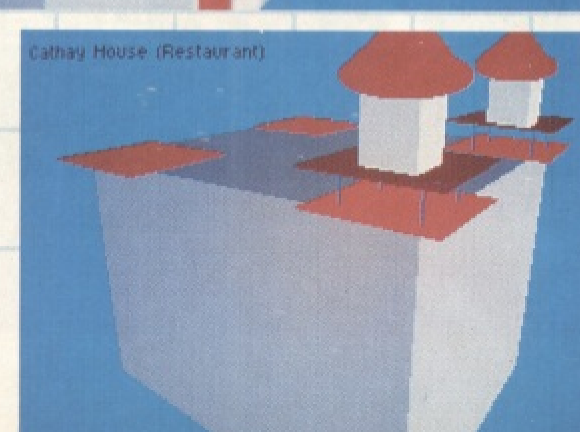
Shapes are mathematically modified by the mapper to fit into the landscape; automatically angling the base of a house on a hillside is a good example. In this case, the shadow of the swing which obviously isn't correct at this object design stage will be flattened by the mapper. In fact, all shadows except those which would normally split when passing over uneven terrain, are accurately rendered by Killing Cloud's 3D.





Each object is given specific attributes which decide whether it can be shot, broken or affected by water. Also, there are different complexity levels so that it's up to the player to decide at what speed the game should play. To attain maximum speed, elements with maximum bells and whistles (such as this arty Chinese restaurant) can be sacrificed...

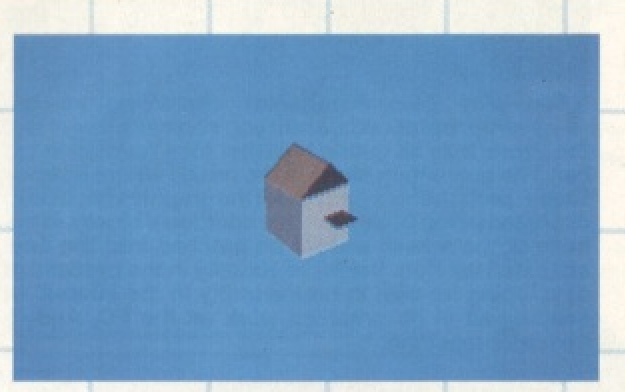
In favour of this – the faster, more Spartan version.

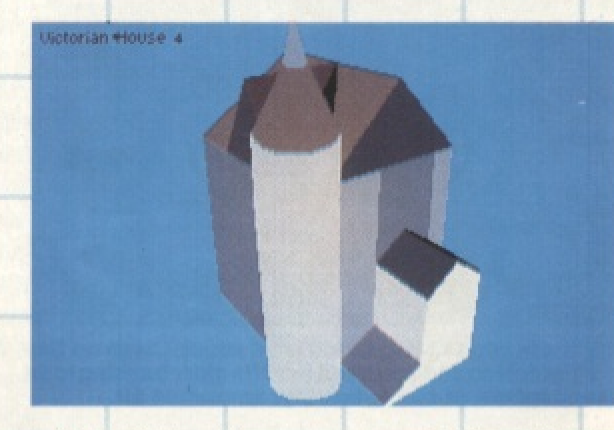


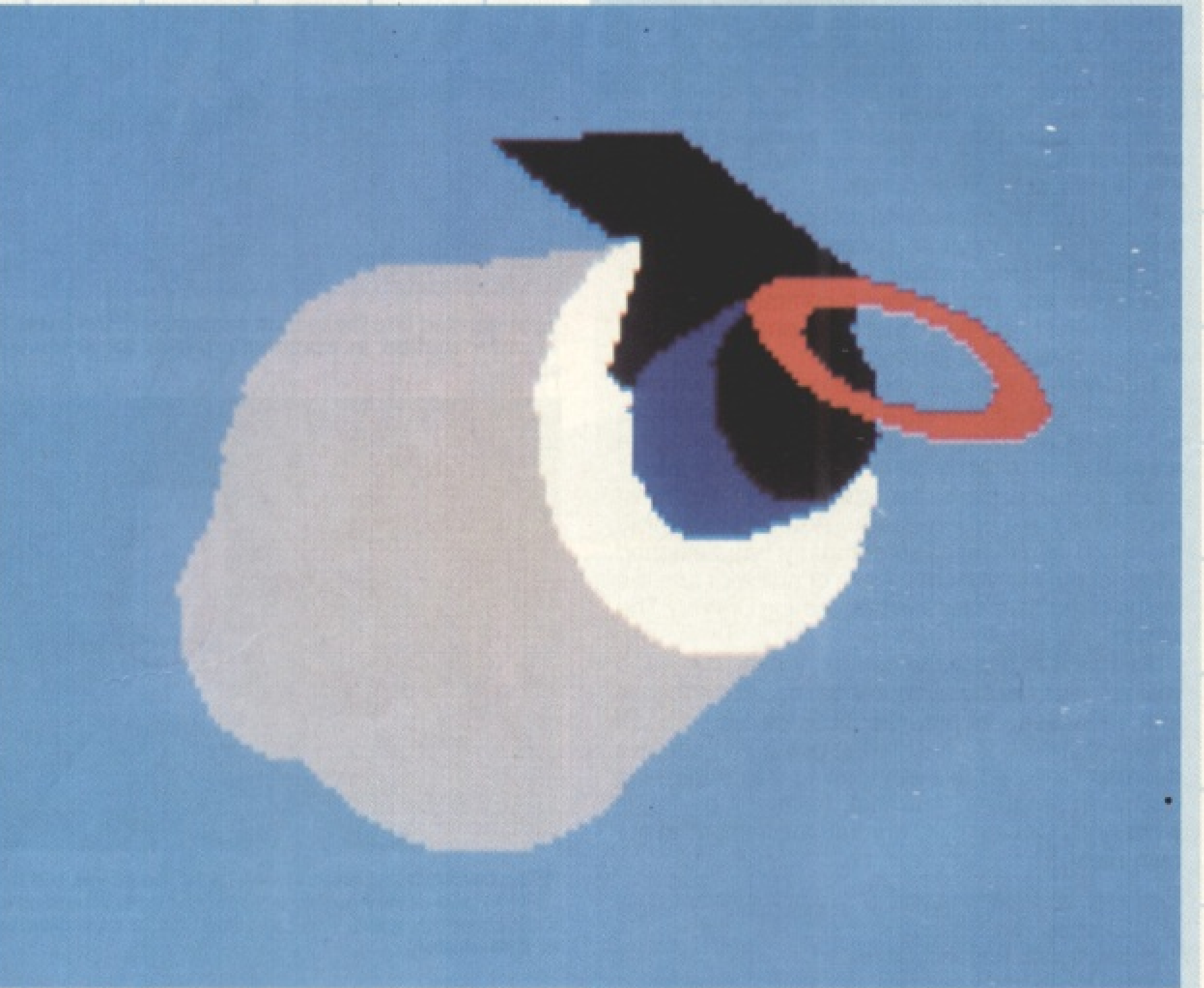
g Cloud

Another of Derrick's experimental objects illustrates one of Vektor's greatest 3D achievements. You don't just get ellipses, rings and cylinders, you can actually see through the ring-pull at the end of the grenade. While all this is done manually at the moment, Vektor is working on a powerful object editor which should be able to cope with even greater complexity – hopefully a transparent cylinder effect.

One feature that hadn't been perfected when Fighter Bomber was released is automatic 3D simplification when objects are viewed from a distance. The reduced visibility of the cloud effect near ground level means that buildings at close range can be fairly complex graphically because only one is ever visible at a time.

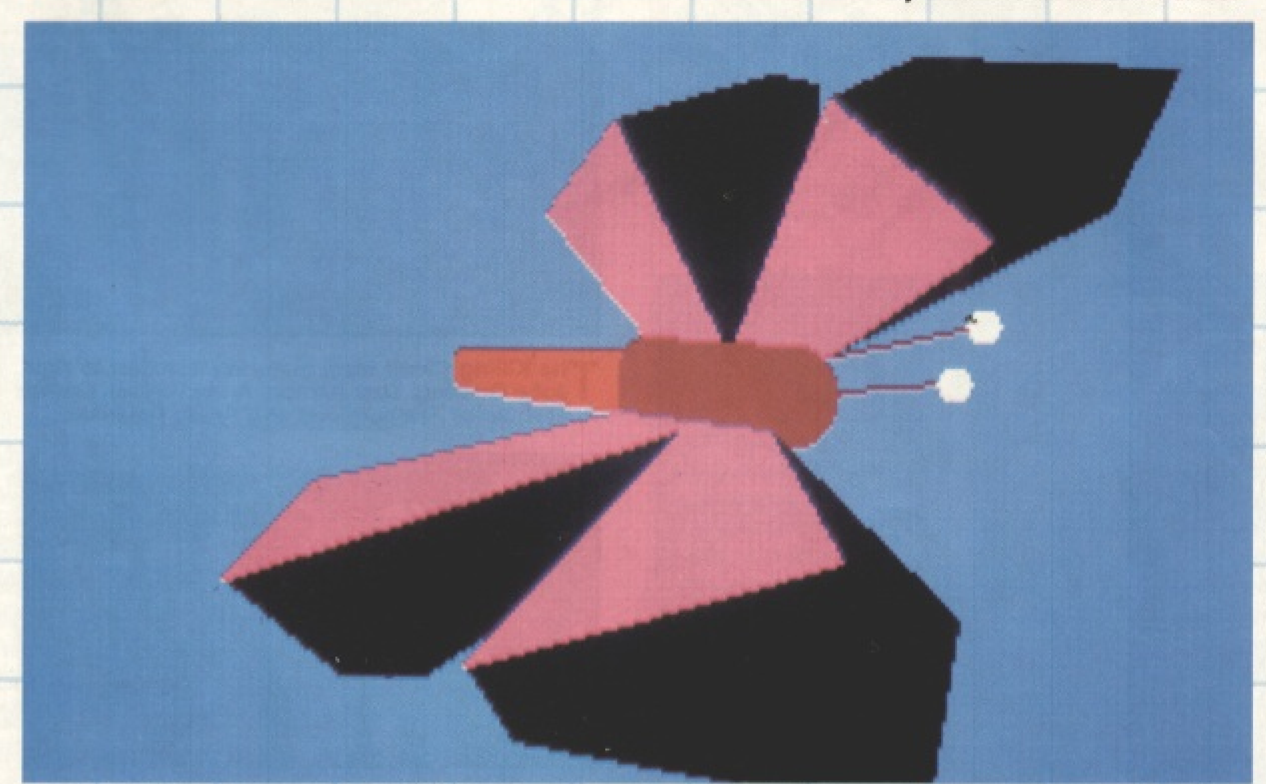






From a distance, however, you wouldn't realistically be able to see more than a basic outline so all superfluous polygons are automatically removed. Under the cloud, all buildings have maximum z-values so that they actually disappear when they've been left a certain distance behind.

No, this isn't some mutant San Francisco monster, it's one of the shapes that Derrick knocked up when Vektor first started working with ellipse technology to see what they could come up with. The wings are designed so that they can be directly articulated by the mapper without there being any need for more memory-intensive animation frames.



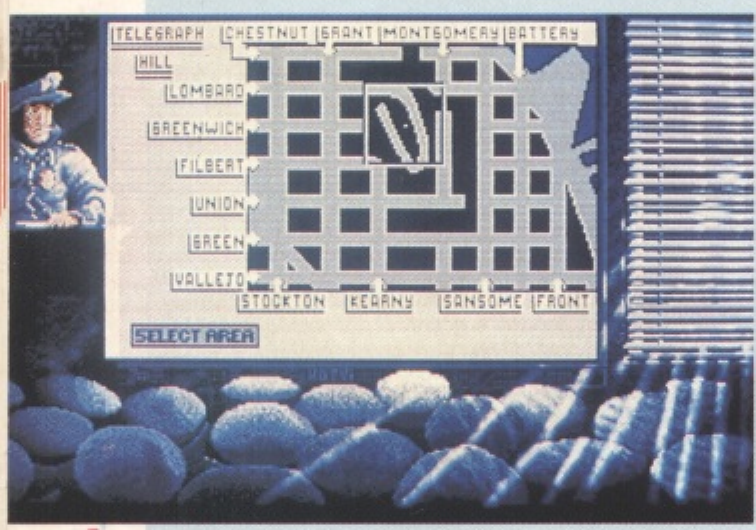
3D. It'll be the second game ever to make use of ellipses and cylinders. The first was Mirrorsoft's Interphase: "Adrian got there first but we were getting there and ringing him up to tell him how far we'd got. In the end we came to an arrangement whereby he let us use his information." And that was only the beginning – since then Vektor's concentrated on enhancing the technique.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

In effect, the Killing Cloud 3D system is a direct descendent of that used in Fighter Bomber. "After Bomber we just ripped everything out and started putting it back together again as a totally modular system."

As part of the rebuilding process, improvements are being added all the time... Killing Cloud is a product of a system which is in itself still in development – it won't be until sometime next year that an all-singing, all-dancing version should be well and truly complete. In any case, the Killing Cloud techniques are a marked improvement over those used in Fighter Bomber and whatever they produce next year should be even more sophisticated than that.

The big question is, will it be another simulation? Andy explains: "We originally went into simulations because 3D lends itself to it very well. When I came into 3D in 1986, my first influences were very much like Starstrike, so when Vektor started we were very much going down that avenue. Then we took a look



The final game will have 3D alternating with arcade sequences like this one. You are given a mission briefing at headquarters at every level of the game. From here you gain access to more detailed parts of the San Francisco map in order to position nets and pick-up pods (PUPs) to bring in suspects for questioning. These sections are being developed using Snasm on PCs. A specially developed MS-DOS emulator allows disks to be written out on the PC for use directly in an ST or Amiga.

at the American market and as soon as we started doing fill stuff it became apparent that simulators were a very good medium for it." Producing flight simulators also makes sound commercial sense, as they tend to have a higher price and longer shelf life than most other products.

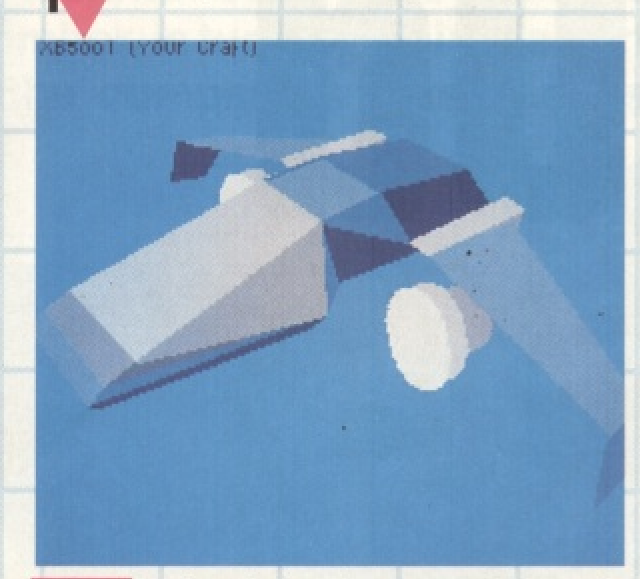
But, Andy points out, there's no reason why the company shouldn't branch out into other 3D areas such as arcade adventures. In fact, considering the areas they're already planning to diversify into, it looks as if the sky's the limit. One of the most exciting of these new ventures is Vektor's move into the world of movies. The company has designed some of the storyboards, main characters and the inside of the Tardis for the forthcoming Dr Who: The Movie.

And as if to prove the company's flexibility and willingness to tackle almost anything, Andy reveals that he's been approached by the Ministry Of Defence, which is considering going into console development and is even looking into publishing their own products. And that, believe it or not, is what Andy Craven calls gradual expansion "at our own pace."

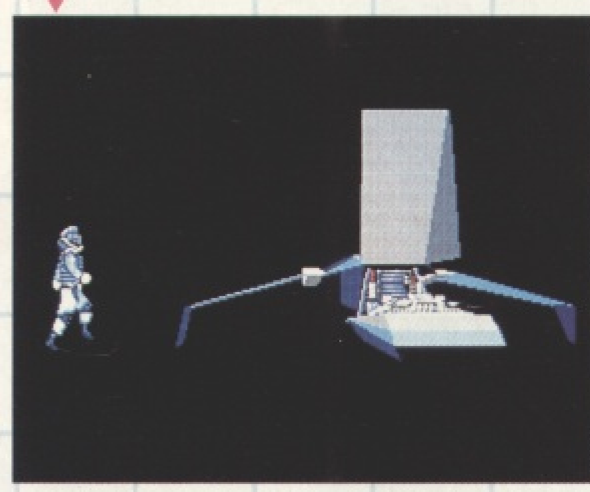


You arm your own craft up to a maximum recommended weight. Go beyond it and you can still fly out into the San Francisco smog, but with the consequent reductions in the manoeuvrability and speed of your craft automatically modified.

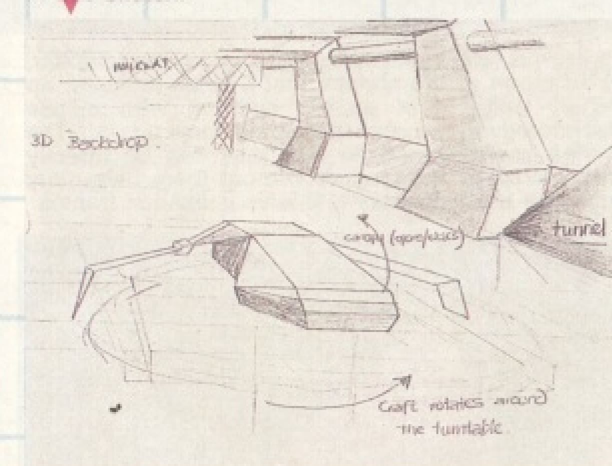
Your 3D craft, shown here in object design mode...



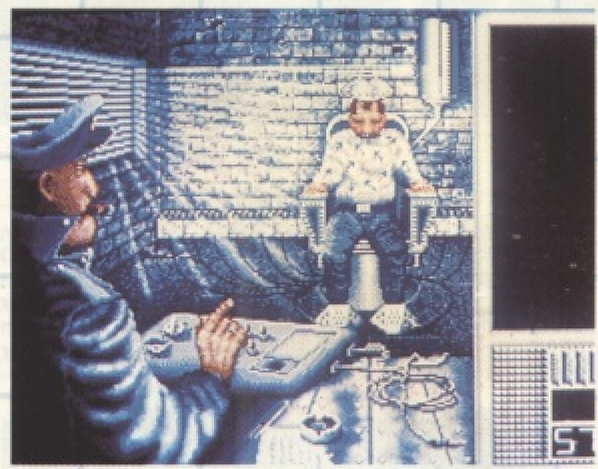
is integrated into the launch sequence of the game's arcade section in conjunction with an animated sprite.



The background hasn't been included as yet, but the plan is to draw a highly complex hangar intended to look something like The Last Starfighter as indicated in this sketch.



Interrogation is a fairly humane affair. A menu of available questions can be supplemented by a combination of slow-acting truth drugs and fast-acting electric shocks. Unless you're careful it could all prove too much for the victim.



You play several different characters as the adventure proceeds, and if you survive till the end of the game, they all gather together for a reunion in the bar. The guy sitting alone is the rookie whom nobody likes – perhaps he's got BO. All the graphics have been designed using DPaint III – the additional blocks at the base of the screen should be patched into the final animated version. Vektor is actually in the process of developing its own in-house utility in the interest of keeping all of its graphics work on the PC, Andy's favourite machine.



This is what Killing Cloud is all about. Clean up San Francisco and you see it in all its glory basking in an atmosphere of clean, healthy, smog-free air.



The Killing Cloud team featuring from left to right, John Guering, Tom Ashton, Andy Craven, Derrick Austin, Peter Featherstone and Adam Polanski.



THE MAPPER

Vektor is very proud of the mapping system which integrates 3D objects into a working environment – so proud that the team wasn't prepared to let us take any pictures of it in case any of their competitors caught sight of it. In fact, not even Realtime (Vektor's partners in the development of Snasm) has actually clapped eyes on it.

It works by giving the programmer the ability to create a grid and then place objects on it by defining points. There's no limit to the number of possible co-ordinates and a single game could consist of several grids inside one another. One square of one grid, for example could hold another complete grid landscape. There's almost no limit to the size of a master grid. At present, Killing Cloud's grid is about the size of a continent but it could be expanded even further out into space.

More basic features like lakes and runways can be created directly on the grid. In practice more complex objects – buildings for example – are designed externally before being downloaded, although in theory it's possible to create graphics as complex as Bomber's Mount Rushmore purely using mapper co-ordinates.

BRITAIN'S BIGGEST SELLING SPORTS HIT ... IS ABOUT TO HIT THE WORLD ...

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With the success of Football Manager 2, have come more suggestions for an even better game. Kevin has responded with "Football Manager: World Cup Edition", a game that takes management into the international arena, with all the thrills of world cup competition, a game that takes the unique components of its two ancestors and radically improves them a game that will better the best.

Kevin Toms.

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How can you possibly improve on the greatest football game ever? Good question. Gary Whitta put it and many others to author Dino Dini.

Kick Off 2

It's pointless trying to describe Kick Off to anybody who hasn't experienced it first hand – although these days you'd be hard pushed to find anybody who fits into that category.

Just about every red-blooded ST and Amiga owner in the country has been part of the Kick Off phenomenon since it first began last June. Since then, the game's incredible success and the release of its two spin-offs, Extra Time and Player Manager, have served to further emblazon the name of the man who started it all in the annals of programming history.

That name is Dino Dini.

For a man who started his programming career with the Acorn System 1, and had only two published games before Kick Off (Astro Tracker, an Asteroids variant on the BBC, and the Amiga version of Anco's Trivia Trove), the boy Dini's done good.

It's a shame then, that with all this glory going around, poor old Dino is far too busy to sit down and wallow around in some of it for a bit – he's earned it after all. Instead he's got his nose to the grindstone, beavering away on what is the next logical progression in the Kick Off saga – a full-blown sequel.

The big question is, of course, how do you go about following what is arguably the greatest football game ever? No easy task, surely. As Dino pus it: "Well, Kick Off is not perfect by any means – when I did Player Manager, for example, I changed the way in which the players behaved because I wasn't entirely happy with it." Now in Kick Off 2, even though it wasn't Dino's decision to produce it, he's got a lot more scope to include ideas and make changes that just didn't happen in the original for one reason or another.

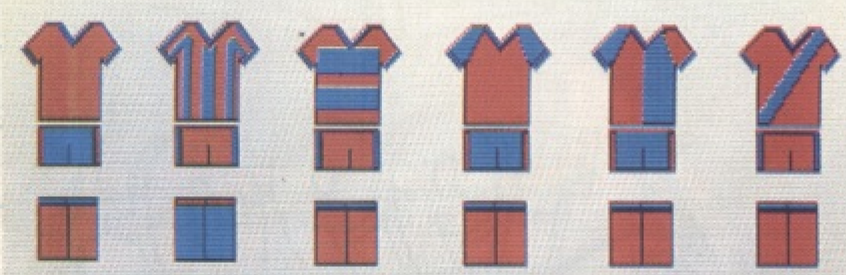
"We've had a lot of letters from people who bought Kick Off suggesting things and putting forward ideas, but mostly they've asked only for cosmetic changes and so on. There are going to be plenty of graphical changes, but the gameplay is also going to be enhanced."

"One thing that people wrote in to ask for was different and more varied strip designs, rather than just plain colours. So that's one thing we're doing. In the single games, the players will choose what type of strip they want their team to wear. They'll be between four and six different shirt designs – plain, striped, plain with a coloured sash, coloured halves and so on. In addition you'll also be able to select what colour shorts to wear, so you've got more kit variations. People like to choose their own colours, and it also means that the players look a lot better."

"Action replays are another thing that a lot of people asked for, and something that I wanted to do in the original. What we intend to do is have a system where any goal scored can be replayed immediately if you want to see it again. It's a system that will probably be limited to goals only – if you had it during play, it would interrupt the flow, whereas after a goal is scored the play stops anyway." It will also be possible to save out action replays and catalogue them on disk – in that way you can produce your very own '100 Great Sporting Moments'.

The League system will remain pretty much the same, although it's going to be on a larger scale – 12 to 16 teams – and with the added factor of goal difference, which never appeared in the original. And Dino also promises that we can expect the computer-controlled teams to be much tougher.

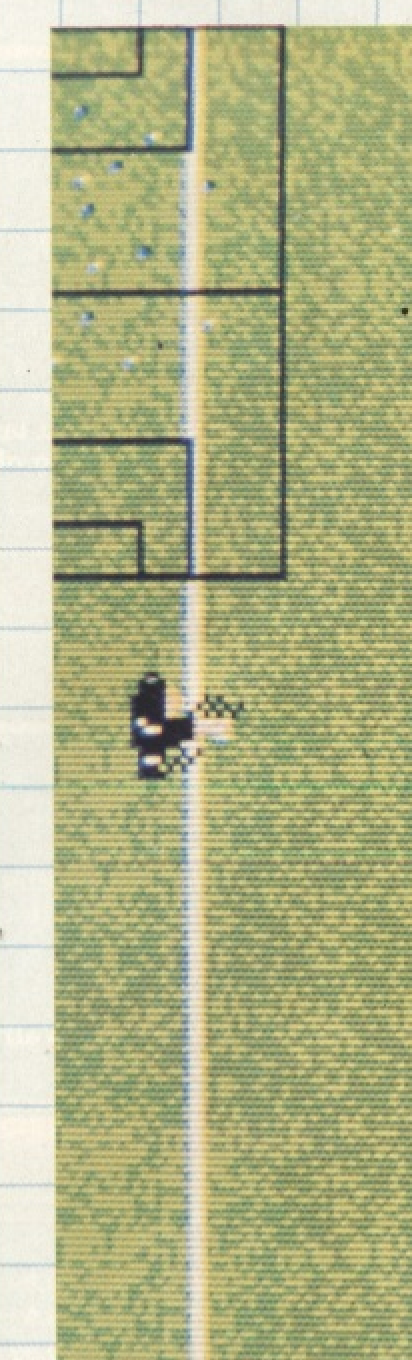
While the main gameplay itself remains pretty much the same – if it ain't broke, don't mend it – there are going to be a few changes. As Dino explains: "The players will perform more as they did in Player Manager. They've got some new variables for a start: Tackling and Passing skill and Resilience – which basically determines the probability of a player getting injured when he's tackled. We're also putting in substitutions. If a player is badly hurt, or he's just not particularly good, you can change him during play for another



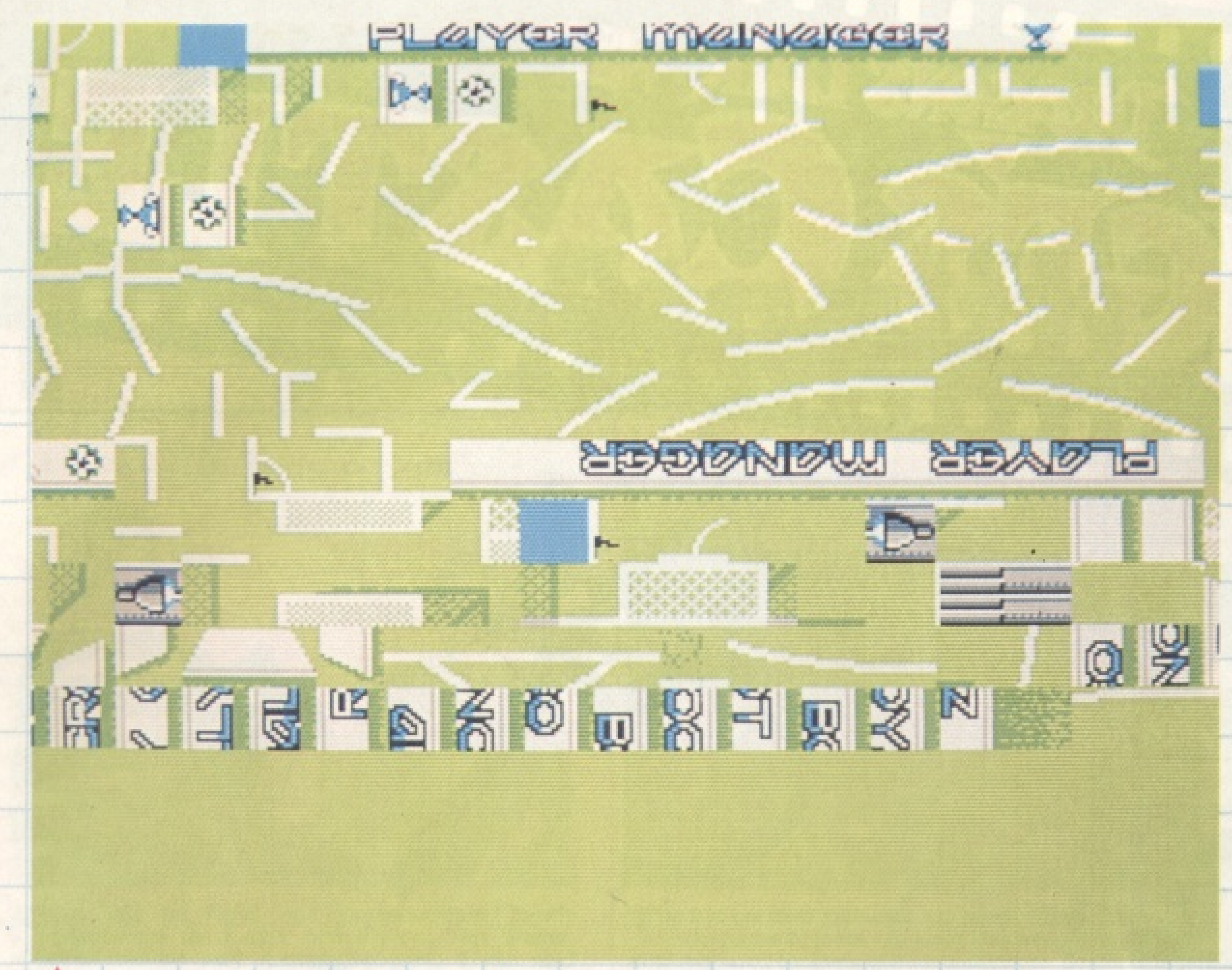
Kits out for the lads! The six basic new strips that will be available in Kick Off 2 – and with all the different colours there are literally hundreds of variations. It's even possible to change the colour of your shorts!

Kick Off 2's sprites are a lot more detailed than those in the original, thanks to the fancy strips. The extra detail can be best appreciated on this working screen, where all the animations for running, jumping, kicking and falling over are shown. Even the ball's been given an overhaul, and now comes with fancy dots on it!

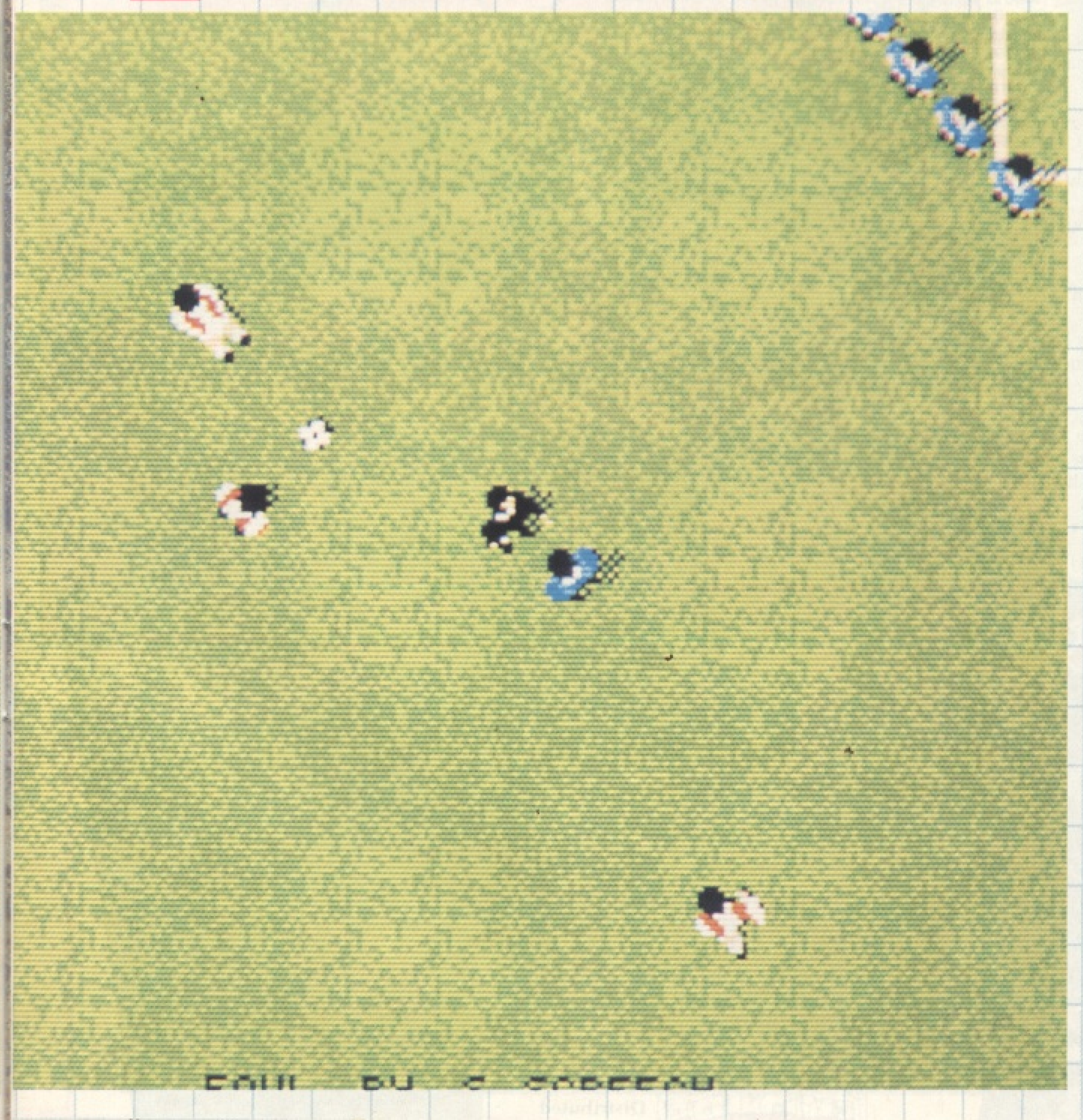




This is what it's all about: Kick Off 2 in action – and do we mean action! In fact in this scene it would seem that it's all got a little out of hand, with the referee booking a player, while another lays flat out nursing an injured leg. Note the linesman with his flag up, and the new diamond-design pitch – the mark of an expert groundsman.



This may look like a bit of a mess at first, but closer examination will reveal that this is actually an entire pitch, broken down into its separate components! By building the pitch up from these building blocks, rather than drawing the whole thing in one chunk, it's possible to save a lot of time – and valuable memory.



WORK IN PROGRESS

player in your squad."

"The control mode itself is going to be subject to a bit of change also. Extra Time was basically a place for us to test out ideas for Kick Off 2 – some worked, others didn't. The introduction of Shotpower was basically a disaster – nobody liked it at all, so we've scrapped that now. Aftertouch, however, which allows you to slightly alter the course of the ball after it's been kicked, was very popular, so that's staying in Kick Off 2. But for anybody who doesn't like it, there'll be an option to play without it."

There's also an added boon for owners of Player Manager – Kick Off 2 will allow you to load in your squad from PM and use it to play in either the single games or the league! In this way, it's possible for two Player Managers to get together, and pit their respective teams that they've built up against each other – something that wasn't possible before. Now any arguments about who's got the best squad can be ended, as scores can be settled on the Kick Off 2 pitch.

Dino's also promising a new selection of referees, which hew says won't be quite so strict as some of those in the original: "there were a few too many crazy ones." There will also be some alterations to the way that free kicks and throw-ins are taken. This time around, he says, it'll be possible to direct a throw-in, and determine how short or long it will be, as well as decide which player to pass to in a free kick. Penalties will remain the same, but it will be possible to change the power of a corner kick.

But perhaps the most revolutionary addition in Kick Off 2 will be the multi-player mode. With the aid of a simple joystick adaptor, it will be possible for no less than FOUR people to play simultaneously in a match. "The way it works," explains Dino, "is two on two – that is to say two people playing together on each side. This will allow for teamwork and strategy to develop as the players work with each other."

"Obviously you can't work it as normal, with the nearest player to the ball under human control – with two people on a team, how would you decide who gets control? So what will happen is you'll play position like in Player Manager – each of the two players selects one footballer and constantly controls him throughout the whole game. The rest of the players are controlled by the computer. Alternatively, one player will play position, while another will be 'free roaming', just like in the original."

But what about people without four-way joystick adaptors? "On the Amiga it shouldn't be a problem – two people can play from the keyboard. But on the ST there's a technical problem, as it has a problem in reading from the keyboard and the joysticks at the same time, so there may be a necessity for an adaptor."

Graphically, there are no plans for any major upheavals, although the pitch itself is in for a bit of a revamp. Dino is hoping to have a different pitch for every type of weather – the soggy pitch will actually look soggy, and so on. There's also a possibility of having a referee and his linesmen rushing about on the pitch, to make the overall effect all the more realistic. "Unfortunately, there are a lot of graphics required for that, so these effects might only be available on the expanded Amiga," he warns.

Looking at things from a more technical point of view, Dino's writing on the ST using the Aztec C Assembler, which isn't particularly popular with many programmers, but suits Dino's requirements quite nicely. Of course much of Dino's original Kick Off code is being taken directly and put to use here, which might explain the relatively short development time – from start to finish, the entire project should have taken about three months.

And what's Dino planning to do when it's all over? "I'm going to take a long break – it's about time I had one. After that I'm not sure – I'm not really looking too far ahead. I might do a different sport, depending on the ideas I get. Then again I might just pack it all in." Heaven forbid...

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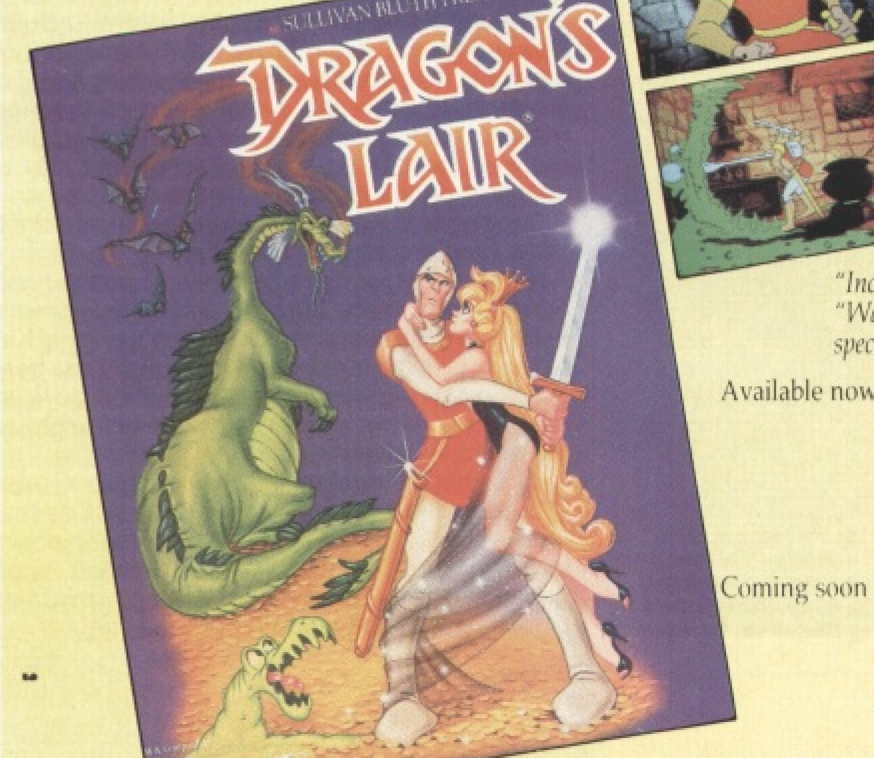
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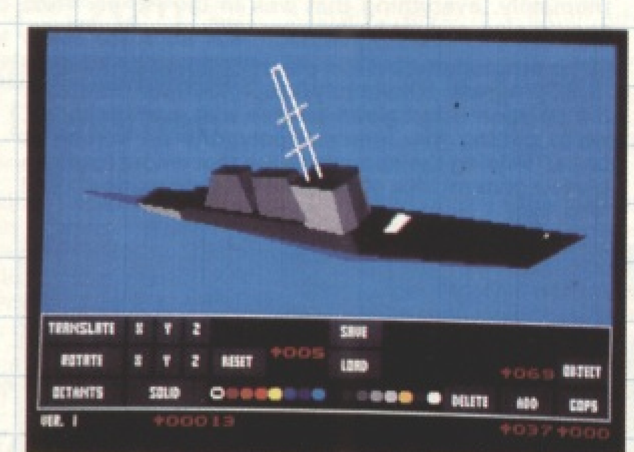


F-19 Stealth Fighter

Microprose's invisible jet fighter has been evading detection inside the nation's IBMs for over a year now. Gordon Houghton takes off for Tetbury to see how its ST and Amiga hangar-mates are shaping up.



From left to right, the programmers jointly responsible for F-19's conversion: Tim Walter, Malcolm Hellon and Adrian Scotney. Their next project, after the mission disks, should be the 'more than likely possibility' of ST and Amiga versions of F-15 Strike Eagle II (reviewed on the PC in Issue 13).



The trio created their own shape editor to design all the in-game objects – everything from aircraft and runways to oil tankers and city buildings. Areas which you never see (such as the bottom of a hangar) aren't drawn to save on processing time. Objects can be turned through any angle and inspected in greater detail. Before being slotted into the game proper, though, the colours need to be altered because the PC has a different palette. After passing through the shape editor, objects are processed by a second editor which sorts the polygons into a more realistic and time-economical form – areas which overlap are removed. This is particularly useful since some of the game elements are composed of more than one object: the aircraft carrier, for example, comprises a hull and tower section fused together.



An animated slide-projector delivers the options at the mission selection stage, the projection screen displaying a map and text. Because you fly a stealth fighter, a lot of the missions involve cloaking the plane in enemy territory and attempting to photograph sensitive areas, deliver cargo or engage in reconnaissance. Being discovered results in a loss of points – or worse.

There are 11 different viewpoints available – five inside and six outside the plane – but this is one (taken from the shape editor) which you won't see unless you manage to shoot down an enemy. Should the mission end in disaster, you can always bail out and (hopefully) get rescued. Luckily, the program has a default training mode to help rookies break in their flying gloves.



Originally released on the PC in March 1989, F-19 Stealth Fighter was reviewed in Issue Six to an enthusiastic reception and a rating of 91 per cent.

The plane in question, developed by Lockheed primarily for strikes deep behind enemy lines, is almost impossible to pick up on radar thanks to its shape, the materials used in its construction, a series of sophisticated radar jammers and its low-flight capability.

Impossible to detect, yes, but not impossible to simulate, as Microprose's US programmers managed to have the first versions up and running even before the plane had been officially unveiled.

In the year that's passed since the PC launch, Microprose UK has been given the task of producing the ST and Amiga conversions, a job which has in turn fallen to its new in-house programming team: Tim Walter, Malcolm Hellon and Adrian Scotney.

So how have they gone about achieving the taxing task of translating such a complex flight simulation? "We began with the 3D routines," Tim Walter reveals. "The most time-consuming aspect so far has been getting the 3D movement up to speed, and even now it's not quite as we'd like it."

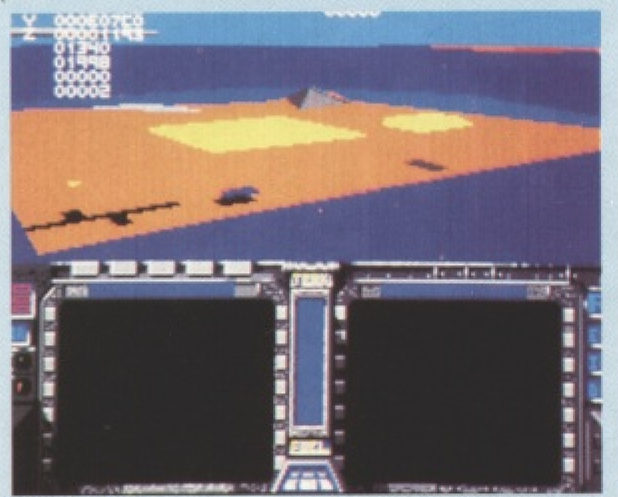
A lot of man-hours went into reappraising the PC code and adapting it for the ST and Amiga: essentially the conversions are a substantial redevelopment, the trio creating their own programs for environment generation.

And what an environment! It covers four different scenarios in Libya, the Persian Gulf, Central Europe and the North Cape, and according to Microprose, that's around six million square miles of playing area. Understandably, Tim admits: "We've played the PC version for months and still haven't found everything." In addition to this quartet, the ST and Amiga versions should feature another couple of battlegrounds, with over 100 missions.

Conversion work has been going on for the past nine weeks, heading towards primary game testing in mid-April, with release pencilled in for late May or early June.

All of the initial work is done on a PC, with the programmers cross-developing using a PDS-2 system and downloading to the ST: "The PC is a lot better than the ST because it assembles and debugs so much faster and you've got the advantage of the hard disk." The dynamic trio are constantly refining the 3D system, rewriting their

WORK IN PROGRESS



Every part of the 3D generation routine undergoes a strict debugging test. The debugging numbers and game movement are displayed on screen simultaneously for ease of use – this slows the game speed but doesn't otherwise affect the running. More detail has yet to be added to these basic landscapes, including cities, animated windmills, bases and roads. Ultimately, everything that was in the PC versions should also appear here.

The programmers claim plenty of potential for their 3D program: "Obviously it depends upon the size of the polygon – but given an area with average detail, we're getting five hundred polygons on screen at once." Adding the console to the movement routines gives a general idea of what the finished game should look like.



Arm your fighter from a selection of 19 weapons which ranges from 'Fire And Forget' thermal-imaging missiles to laser homing bombs. Add these to a fighter with a maximum speed of Mach 1.1, and you should have no trouble getting back alive. Success, on the other hand, is a different kettle of fish.

After each mission a progress report details the action with a combination of comic-strip style graphics and the scenario map. A line traces your course across the territory, and every significant element is recorded: unleash a Sidewinder, destroy the enemy, crash and you get it all thrown back in your face when you get back to base.



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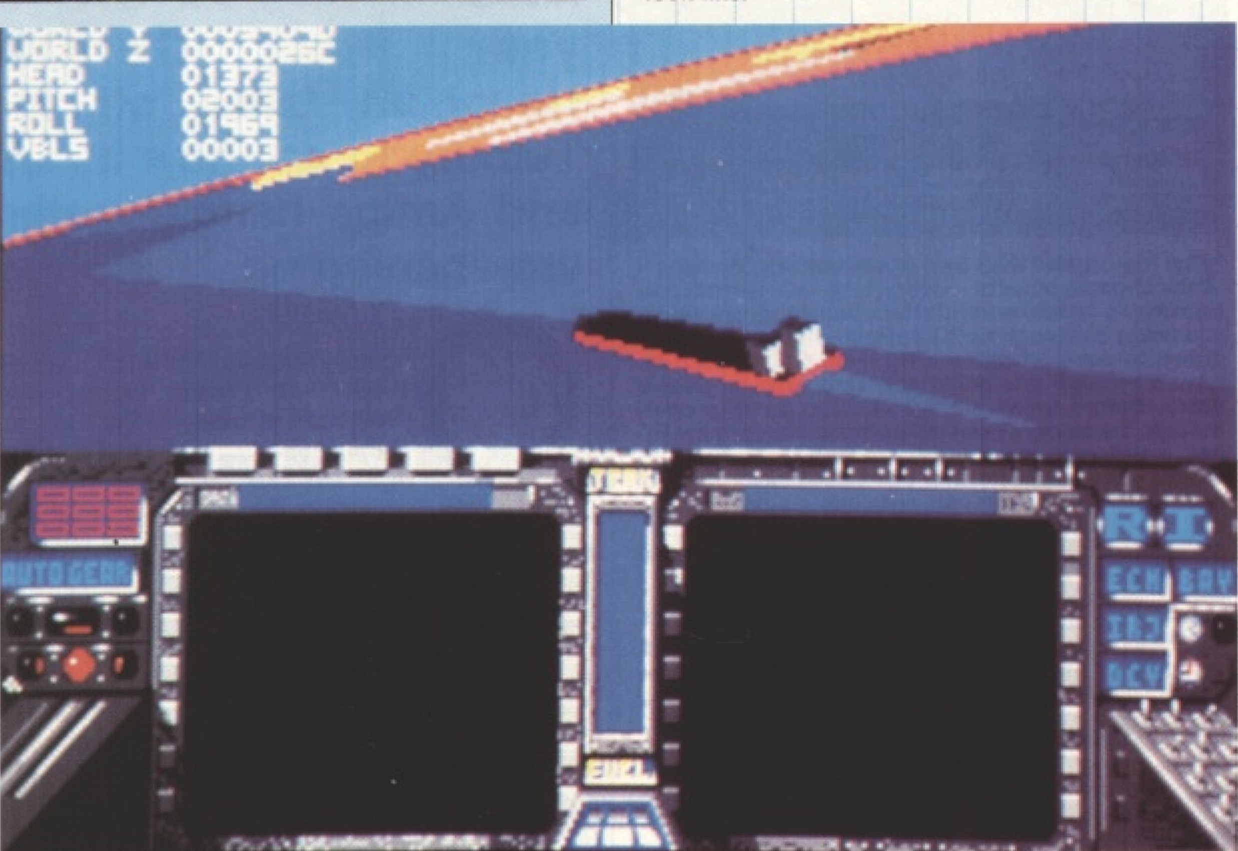
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own techniques striving to achieve ever-faster frame times.

The game itself takes in a combination of existing bases, roads and towns (accurate down to a relatively fine degree of detail), coupled with precise flight simulation elements. Tim has just been putting the finishing touches to the F-19's artificial intelligence, and offers some basic tips: "The art of piloting is to fly low, flat and slowly, so that the plane shows little surface area and no heat is generated by the wings."

The ST version is due to be finished first, with the Amiga and its enhancements closing the project. As Tim explains, these enhancements are basically sound and colours. Sonically there should be a wide selection of sampled sound effects on both versions, the Amiga probably including explosions and snatches of speech such as 'cleared for take off' or 'primary target destroyed'. However, no decision has yet been reached about the music. The Amiga version should have more colours and run slightly faster than the ST – it may even feature the graded horizon found in F-15 Strike Eagle II. On both versions the team is aiming to get 10 frames a second as the slowest speed.

The new versions will come with the same extensive packaging which graced the PC version: keyboard overlay, 192-page manual, mission maps and technical supplement. In addition, the future holds strong possibilities for F-19 mission scenario disks, featuring areas such as Vietnam, Japan and South America. Some of these may even be added to the current program disks: We're trying to cram in as much as we can for now. And as if it isn't big enough already!



All the static graphic screens were rendered in DPaint – this picture of the bar-room after a successful mission still needs to be touched up, but gives an idea of the finished article. Note the F–15 arcade machine in the background.

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THE ONE'S GUIDE TO PRICE, RELEASE DATE AND EVERYTHING

You're probably used to reading reams of opinionated waffle elsewhere, but here we let the games speak for themselves. Relevant scenes and sections are shown, with informative captions used to convey the 'feel' of the game in question. Each review is completed by three opinion panels highlighting outstanding points (good and bad), prices, release dates and ratings where applicable. Basically, there's something for everyone, no matter what machine they own – at best a highly detailed review, and at worst a highly-detailed preview. There's nothing clever, just straightforward facts and ratings. Updates will follow where appropriate.

THE RATINGS

GRAPHICS Not necessarily how colourful or well-drawn they are, but how well they enhance the overall effect.
SOUND Again, not necessarily quantity or indeed quality of sound, but how well it's used.
PLAYABILITY How does the game feel? Is it awesomely addictive or plain uninteresting.
VALUE Essentially a reflection of the lasting interest – how much game you get for your money.
OVERALL A useful point of reference – essentially a summary of the preceding ratings.

WHO'S WHO

GARY PENN

Mr Ed has been up to his not inconsiderably-sized lugholes in work once again this month, but he's tried not to let it get him down. He's been getting in plenty of sessions on **Kick Off**, and taking the occasional break to play **Klax** and **Midwinter**. Come on Gaz, put those games away and get back to work...

CIARAN BRENNAN

Ciaran's been playing Indoor Cricket lately, but fortunately it hasn't infringed on his **Kick Off** playing too much – although his undisputed title is beginning to look shakier by the minute as even the likes of Penn are starting to give him an occasional stuffing. Sign on, sign on, with a pen in your hand...

GARY WHITTA

Little Gez has been getting his jollies from his very own **F-15 Strike Eagle** coin-op, which he somehow managed to blag from MicroProse (is he for real?). He's now the proud owner of the only one in the country – honest. "It's great," he says. **Klax, F-29 Retaliator** and **E.Motion** have provided the 16-bit thrills for him this month.

BRIAN NESBITT

Brian likes **Hammerfist** and **Treasure Trap** this month, but neither of those two have proved quite as compulsive as **Midwinter**, which our Bri simply cannot leave alone – except of course when he has to run errands for his mum... Oh, and his brother's lost his ST.

KATI HAMZA

What our Kati did was play **Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters** like there's no tomorrow – but then she'll probably be playing it tomorrow as well. What she did next was play **Kick Off** (who doesn't?), and **Klax** has provided some additional fun. What a gal!

GORDON HOUGHTON

Not a particularly active month for good ol' Gordo. But he's well into **Castle Master** at the moment, with light relief coming in the form of **Klax** and... guess what?

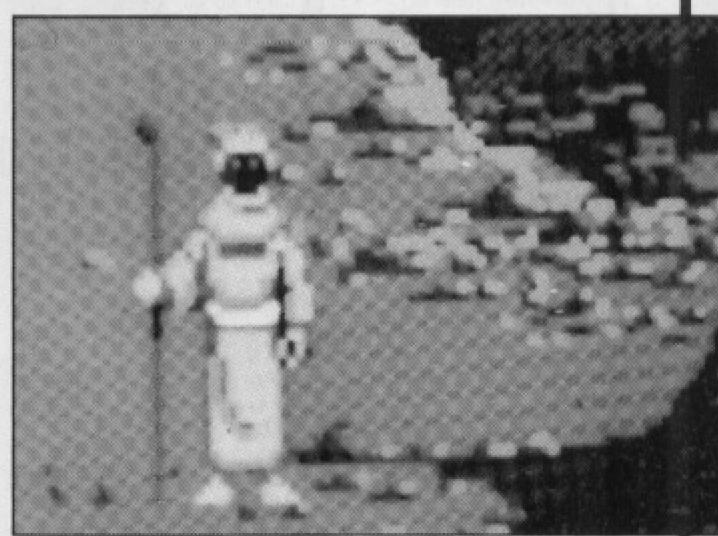
REVIEW

MAY 1990

SHELF TALKERS

ESSENTIAL SOFTWARE OF THE LAST THREE MONTHS

Castle Master (Incentive)
Crack Down (US Gold)
Damocles (Novagen)
E.Motion (US Gold)
F-29 Retaliator (Ocean)
Klax (Tengen/Domark)
Midwinter (Rainbird)
Rainbow Islands (Ocean)
TV Sports: Basketball (Cinemaware/Mirrorsoft)
Warhead (Activision)



WHAT THE STARS ARE PLAYING

VEKTOR GRAFIX

Believe it or not, 16-bit flavour of the month over at VG is the team's own **Fighter Bomber**! But according to Vektor's Andy Craven, the team's also 'well into' **Rainbow Islands** and **Stunt Car Racer**, as well as some of the crustier classics, including FTL's **Oids** and **Dungeon Master**. But the Vektor boys being the trendy pace-setters that they are, they're getting their real kicks from the Nintendo GameBoy, Atari Lynx and PC Engine consoles. Flash sods.

MAELSTROM

The team behind **Midwinter** is, like Vektor Grafix, currently getting lost in its own game! Mike Singleton in particular is devoting all his excess energy to the ice-age strategy extravaganza. Seeing as he designed the thing it shouldn't present too many problems! Mike's also been pitting his not inconsiderable wits against Bullfrog's **Populous**. PC Programmer, Dave Allman, has been battling against **Kick Off** over the last month or so (where is that PC version?), while ST/Amiga man George Williamson has been well into **Stunt Car Racer**. As for administration man Hugh Batterbury, he's been plumbing with **Pipe Mania**, while EA's **World Tour Golf** and Mindscape's **Ultima V** have been occupying PC Programmer Val Franco and graphics man Andy Elkterton's time respectively. How they'll ever get **Starlord** written for MicroProse at this rate we'll never know...

REALTIME GAMES

In between writing **Battle Command** for Ocean and **Duster** for Image Works, the boys behind **Carrier Command** are currently into mindgames, according to Realtime's Ian Oliver. **Nyet**, a Public Domain version of **Tetris** on the PC is currently the team's fave: "It's got rudimentary graphics, but it's fast fast fast!" they enthuse. **Coloris**, another variation on the soviet blockbuster where the object is to join colours rather than make lines, is also proving popular. In between bouts of perplexion, the lads are racing round the streets of San Francisco with Spectrum Holobyte's **Vette!**, and blowing up large sections of countryside in EA's **Abrams Battle Tank**. Strange boys...

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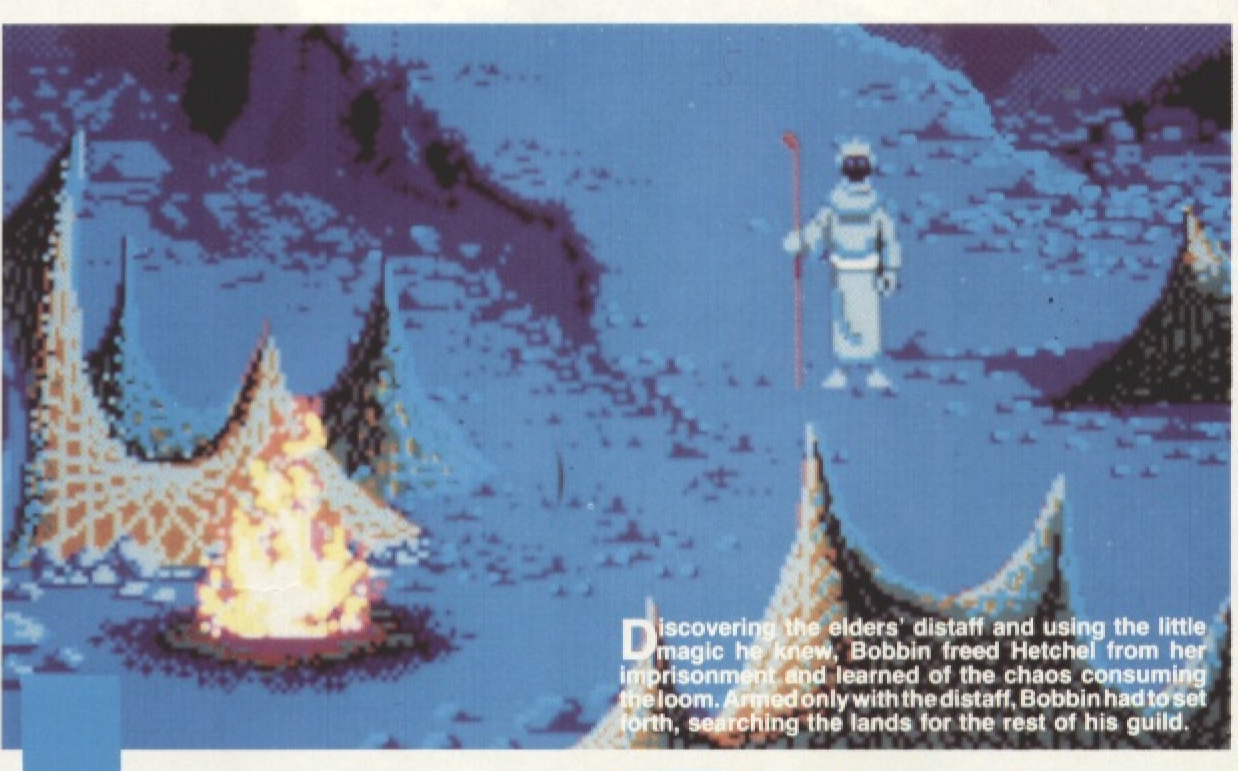
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Discovering the elders' distaff and using the little magic he knew, Bobbin freed Hetchel from her imprisonment and learned of the chaos consuming the loom. Armed only with the distaff, Bobbin had to set forth, searching the lands for the rest of his guild.

Loom



The journey from the island was made perilous by a massive whirlwind, but eventually Bobbin found himself on a beach on the main shore. In the distance he could make out the gleaming spires of a city and, feeling that that was as good a place to start as any, he made his way towards it. The city was breathtaking, every building was carved from green glass.

Approached by one of the city's inhabitants, Bobbin discovered that he was in the Guild Of The Glassmakers and that they were making preparations to defend themselves from a forthcoming attack by the Guild Of Blacksmiths. The knowledge had been gained through the use of their Spheres Of Scrying, allowing them to see the future.

Lucasfilm has Paul Presley in stitches.

Unlike Lucasfilm's previous graphic adventures, Loom is an interactive fantasy tale which comes complete with an audio cassette to set the scene. But the most relevant innovation is the fact that there is absolutely no text input whatsoever: every action is mouse-driven, from picking up a book to splitting the world asunder.

Apparently this came about because of the age-old adventurers' problem of encountering poor vocabularies (what adventure player hasn't been greeted by such responses as 'Sorry, I don't understand' and the like). In order to combat this problem, Brian Moriarty, creator of such Infocom classics as Trinity and A Mind Forever Voyaging, decided to do away with the vocabulary altogether and have each object or situation tell a story rather than create a puzzle.

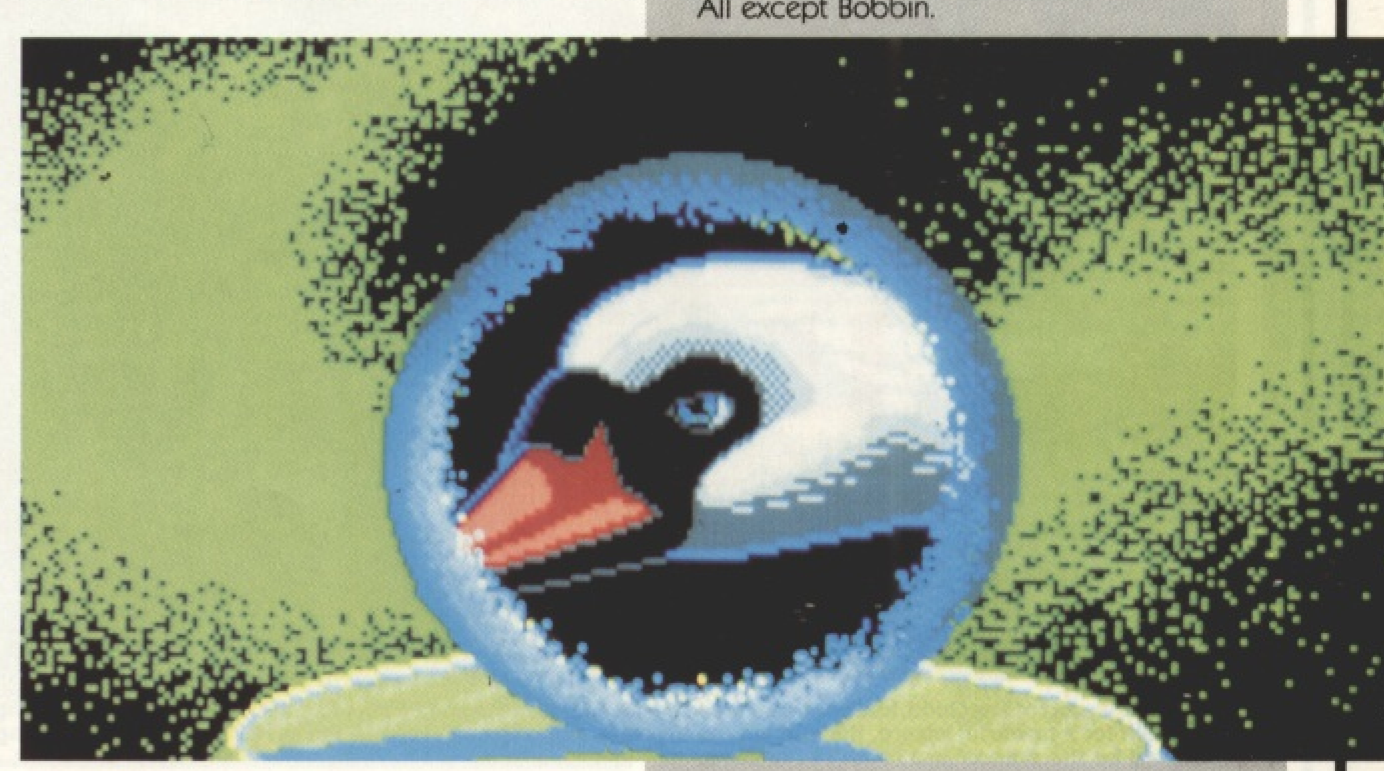
So, what is the story?

From the moment Bobbin Threadbare was born, chaos had spread itself across The Great Loom. The Guild Of Weavers, separating itself from the world on a small island, had long ago created The Loom, weaving strands of fabric so fine that they altered the very essence of life itself, so as to give order to the lands and keep chaos in check. As far as the elders could see, banishing Bobbin from the lands was the only way to restore order.

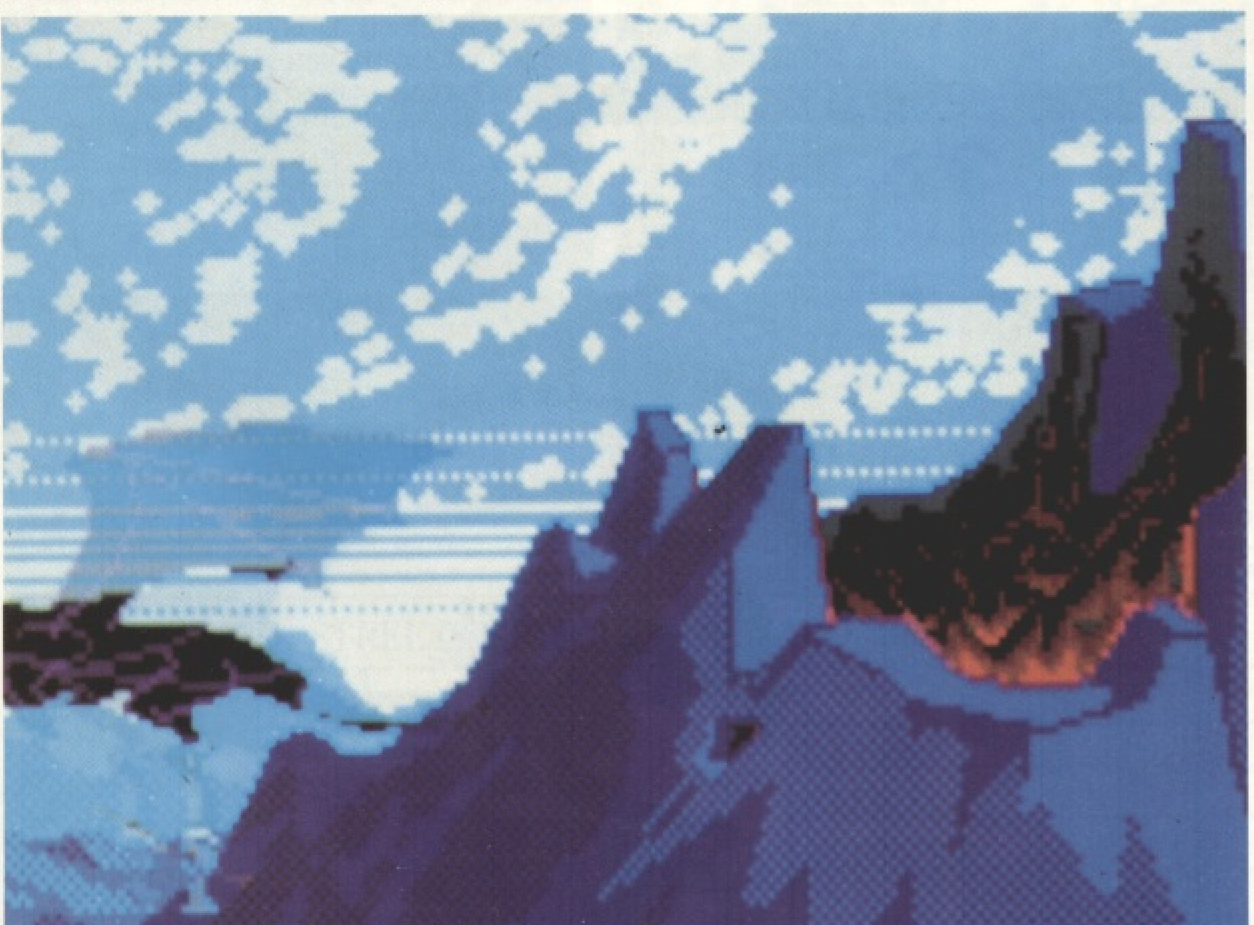
Dame Hetchel, a kindly old lady, had taken the young Bobbin into her care and had taught him the ways of magic, of how to weave strands of music into magical powers. The elders frowned upon this, fearing that Bobbin would grow to be so powerful that he would bring down The Loom and destroy everything.

Punishing Hetchel by transforming her into a cygnet, the Guild Of Weavers was attacked by a great white swan. All of the weavers became swans and were taken away through a portal.

All except Bobbin.



None of the glassmakers had seen a flight of swans, so Bobbin left and travelled on through the forests of the mainland until he was stopped, rather abruptly, by the Guild Of Shepherds demanding a show of power before they would allow him to continue. Thanks to an earlier glimpse of the future, Bobbin outwitted the shepherds and was able to travel on to a nearby village.



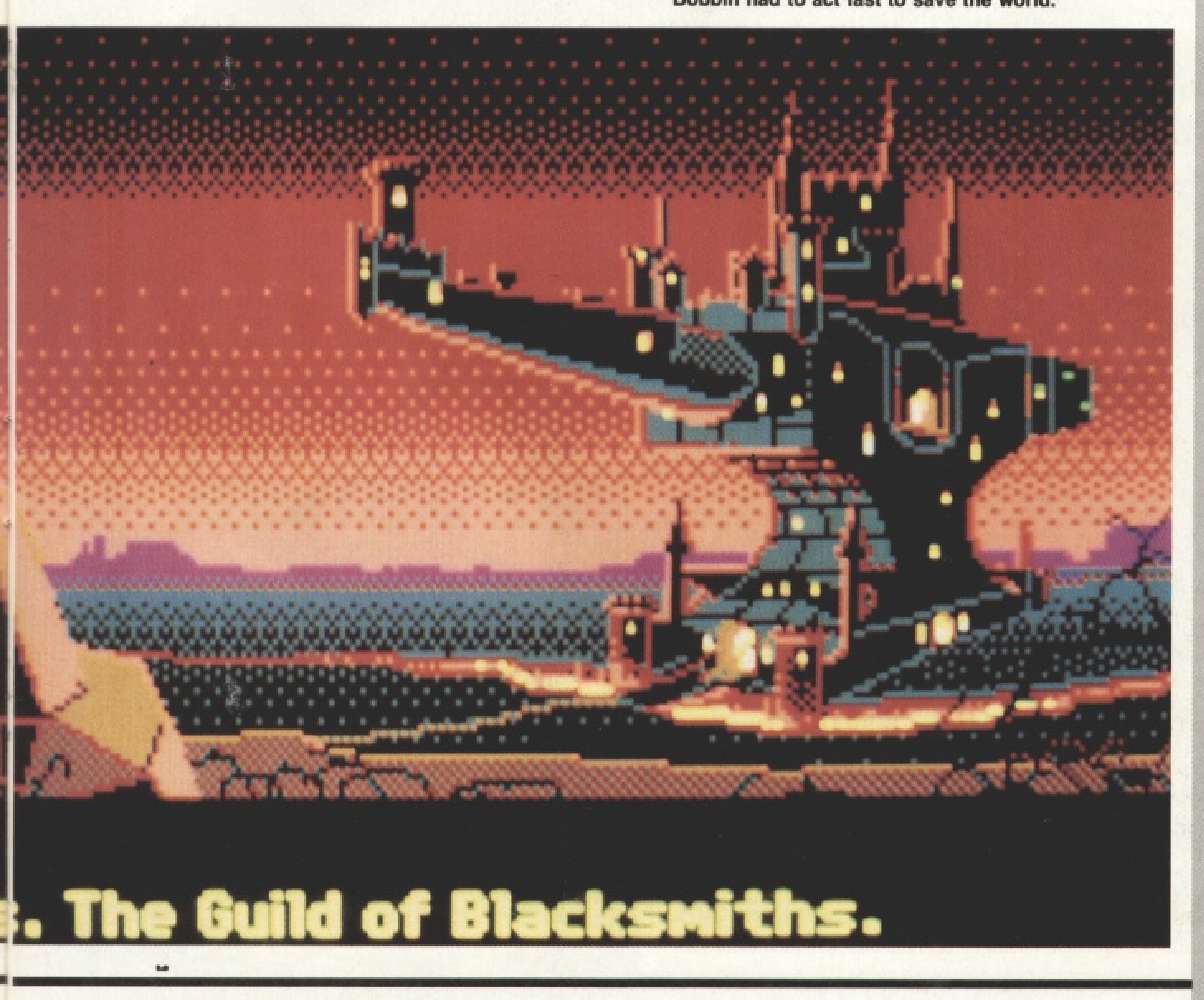
The village, part of The Guild, had been terrorised by a dragon who had taken to eating the locals' sheep. Mistaking Bobbin for a powerful wizard, the inhabitants urged him for his help, help which led to Bobbin himself being snatched by the dragon and taken to her cave.



The dragon, despite appearances, wasn't hostile towards Bobbin and instead seemed to enjoy his company. Bobbin, however, couldn't wait around and so, after hearing one of the dragons tales about another, more powerful, Sphere Of Scrying hidden in the caverns beneath the cave, he set about finding it in a hope to track down his missing guild. Even in the pitch-black of the caverns, Bobbin, through the use of his magic, managed to find the missing sphere – unfortunately it didn't provide too much help.

Emerging from the catacombs, Bobbin came across the sleeping form of a young boy. Gently waking the youth, he discovered he was not far from the Guild Of Blacksmiths, a close-knit group which was working for the evil Bishop Mandible. Disguised as the boy, Bobbin made his way into The Guild and discovered The Bishop's full plan.

In an attempt to invoke the dead spirits, he would lead an army across the land and claim it as his own. Bobbin's snooping led to his discovery and capture. Worse still, The Bishop took the distaff and its power. Bobbin had to act fast to save the world.



PC

After the critical and commercial success of the Indiana Jones adventure, great things were expected of this. Unfortunately Loom comes complete with one major drawback – it's far too easy. The story, presentation and execution are wonderful, improving on all of the company's previous efforts (no mean feat in itself). But the innovative control method is not without its flaws. Rather than giving you a choice of things to do with an object, you merely click the mouse on it and it will automatically carry out its function in the correct sense, thus removing any challenge of finding out what to do. The only puzzles come from learning spells and selecting which to use at the appropriate situation. The fact that there is no way to fail any puzzle simplifies things even more. Casting the wrong spell, for example, doesn't cause any negative effects, so you can just keep casting different spells until you get the right one. As stated, the presentation is excellent: with the use of the AdLib sound board meriting a special mention. Previously the AdLib has come across as sounding like an Amiga on a bad day, but Loom really uses its full capabilities and for once almost puts it on par with Roland's LAPC-1. The in-game soundtrack is actually superior to the audio tape which comes with the package and is intended as a set of instructions cum tips: if prizes were being given out for overacting, then the guys who put that tape together would win it hands down. It's all good fun though. The on-screen graphics and animation surpasses the standards set by Sierra and gives the feel of a movie – in fact the whole thing comes across as more of a film or a book than an adventure in the 'traditional' sense. Strangely the manual states that it is designed to be completed rather than stuck on a shelf, so you get the feeling that Lucasfilm wanted to present a story rather than a game. As such it works well: the characters are captivating, the setting in atmospheric and you want to see what lies next. As a game though, it could use a lot more meat.

PRICE	£34.99
RELEASE DATE	Mid-May
GRAPHICS	89%
SOUND	86%
PLAYABILITY	70%
VALUE	69%
OVERALL	**80%**

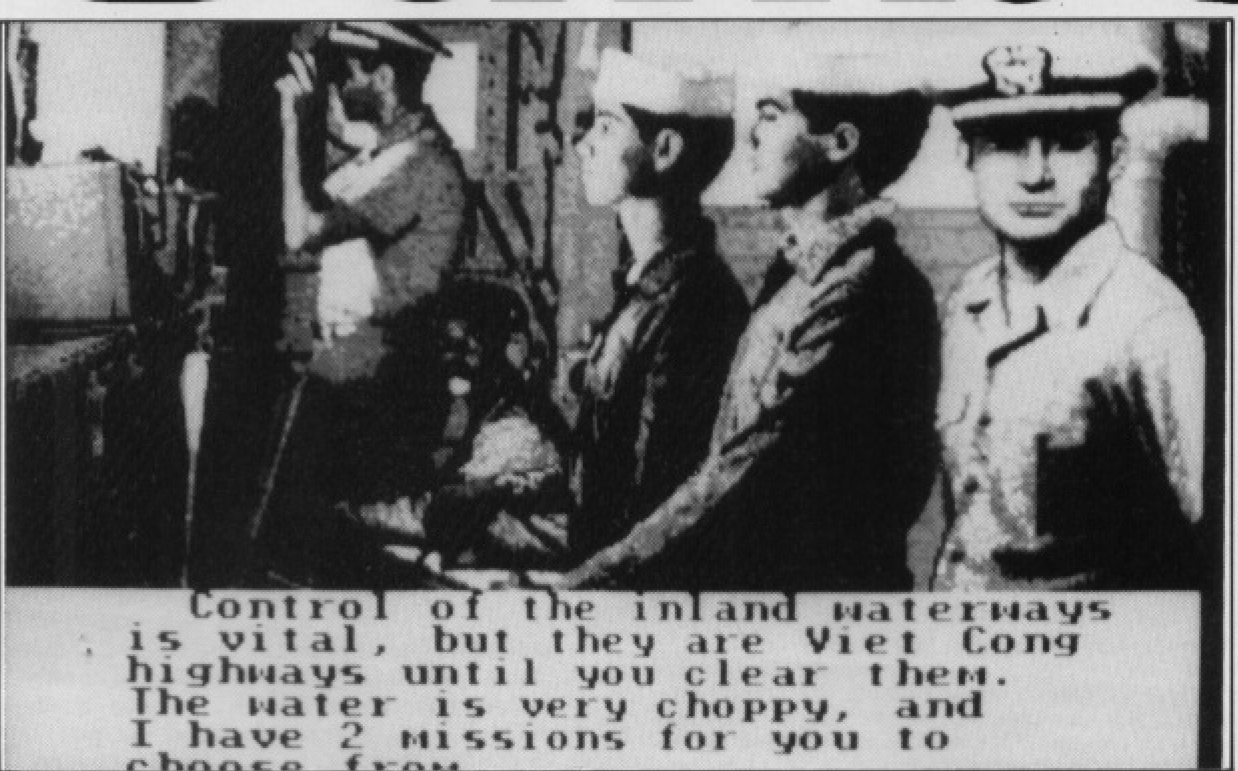


From the start of July, ST-owners can get weaving with what is hoped will be a beefed-up version. Apparently, Lucasfilm has reacted to the criticism that the gameplay isn't challenging enough and is planning to increase the complexity of the puzzles. Fork out £34.99 and you can judge for yourselves.



Emerging at the same time and with the same price as the ST version, this version will differ only cosmetically: albeit with the same beefed up gameplay.

Gunboat



Accolade's latest combat simulator leaves the safety of solid ground to bring war-torn tales from the river bank – Gordon Houghton dips his feet.

For the past three decades the US Navy has deployed a fleet of patrol boats (PBRs) in the world's hottest combat situations: Vietnam, Colombia and the Panama Canal Zone to name but three.

River warfare is traditionally the most hostile and claustrophobic kind of combat: the assailants are in close proximity, visibility is limited, and a surprise lurks around every bend.

Accolade's version throws you into the thick of the action, as a virgin PBR captain assigned to Vietnam. Over 20 missions lie ahead, the difficulty increasing as you smash drug cartels, wipe out renegade Viet Cong or feed bullets to crack troops loyal to a deposed Panamanian dictator. The downside is failure: if you don't get killed yourself there's every chance that your PBR will blow up or sink.

Intercept Sampans TOP SECRET DOC-4A72
NIGHT MISSION: Accept

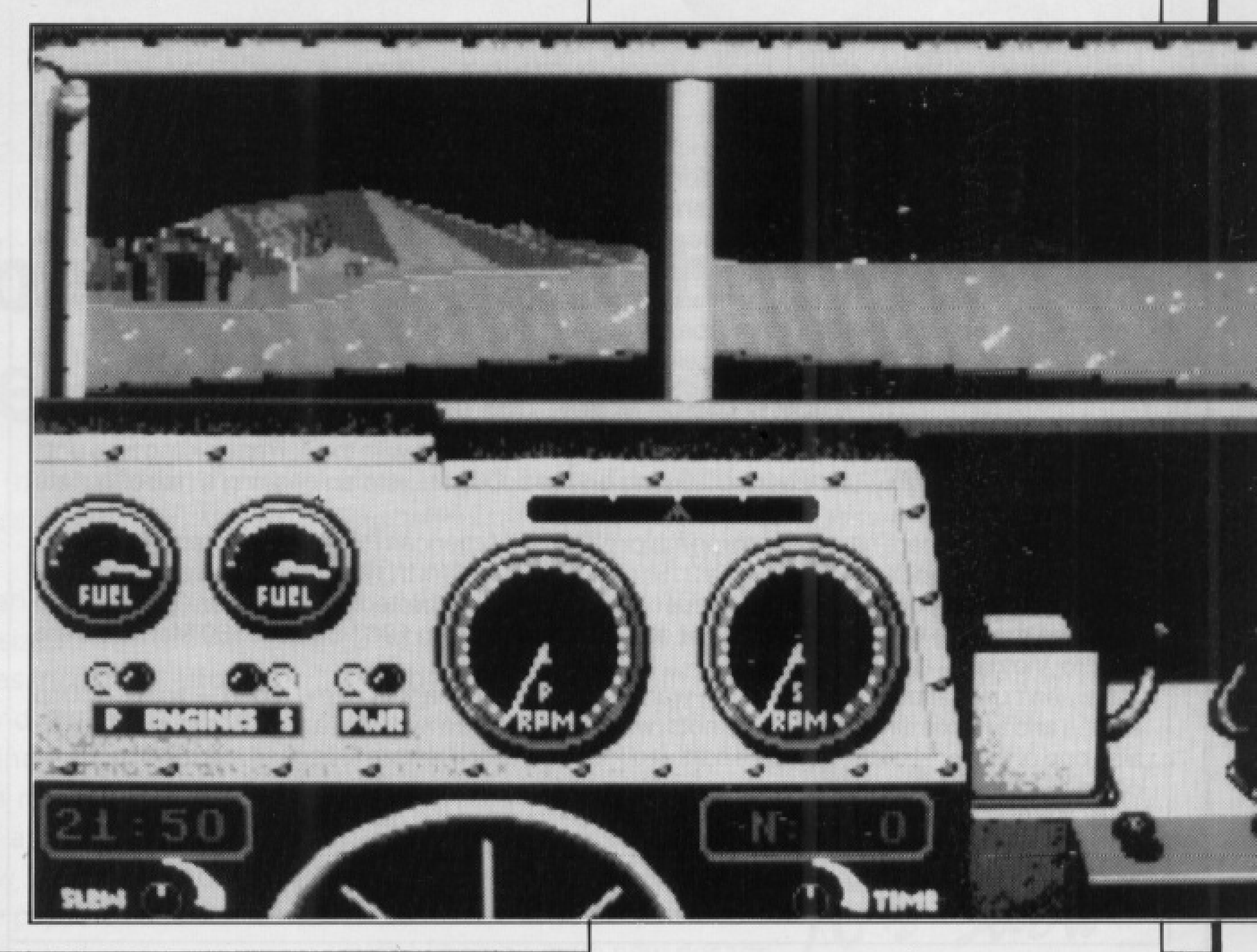
A group of VC sampans carrying enemy supplies and ammunition is reported near My Tho. Identify all vessels before you destroy them. Go find and sink the sampans, watching for ambushes from VC units on shore.

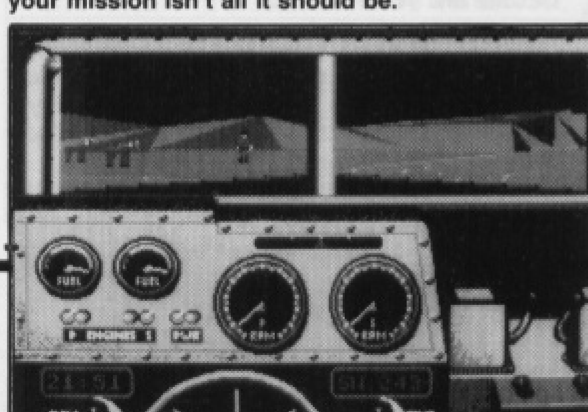
At the beginning and end of every mission you report to naval command. Here, the brass assign tasks, pass comment on your performance and allow you to configure the craft to the speed and armoury specifications of your choice (which, in effect, acts as difficulty levels). Your name and combat record is automatically saved to disk.

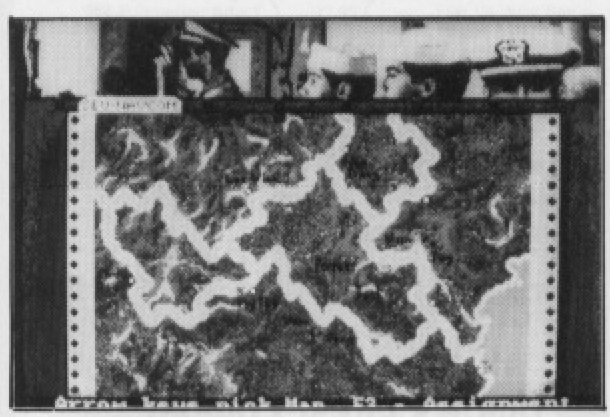
You start the game as a third-class Petty Officer with little gunboat experience, but promotion is quickly gained. Each assignment has a corresponding class, some with medals awarded. As you attain higher rank, more scenarios become available: for example, only experienced pilots who reach the status of Lieutenant Commander or above are allowed to tackle the Panama Canal Zone.

The action begins with the PBR docked at an offshore Landing Ship in Vietnam: on later scenarios the boat is already stationed inland.

The wide-angle 3D view is created using a combination of sprites (for the enemies and objects) and polygons (for the landscape). Once you reach the inland waterways, it's wise to keep at a low speed – the enemy are much less likely to hear you and mines are more easily evaded! Should you be discovered, turning the boat at an angle allows more than one gunner to open fire on the target. If you opt for the gunnery positions, keep an eye on your pilot once you reach Colombia – his dedication to the success of your mission isn't all it should be.

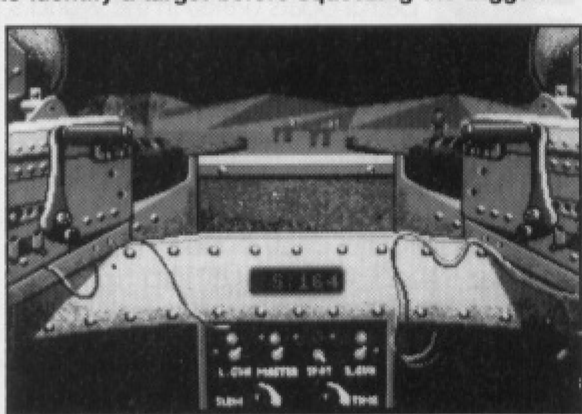


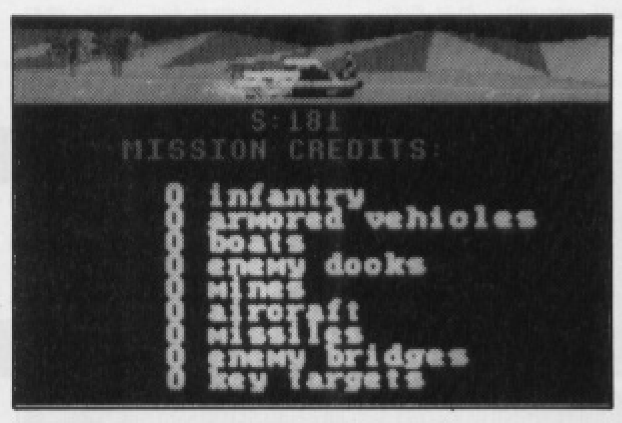




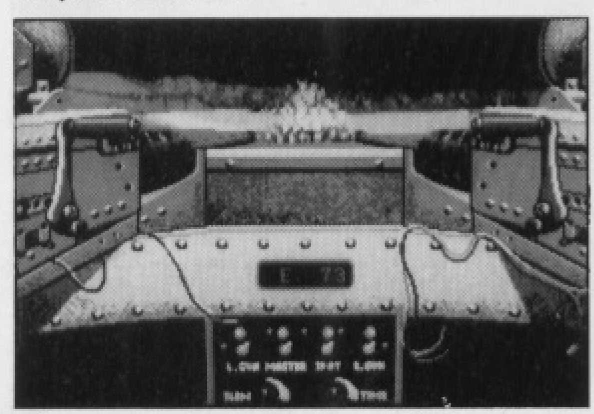
The terrain map is accessible at any time: the cursor marks the PBR position, the arrow your destination. Other in-game information panels include a status screen which details any ship or crew damage, and allows players with poor memories can re-check their mission directives.

The front gunner's station is the most comfortable. From here you can keep an eye on the river ahead, shout commands to the pilot and pick off snipers. Killing water-buffalo gives you instant hamburgers but no points, and killing civilians or allies could land you in serious trouble. For this reason, it's always best to identify a target before squeezing the trigger.

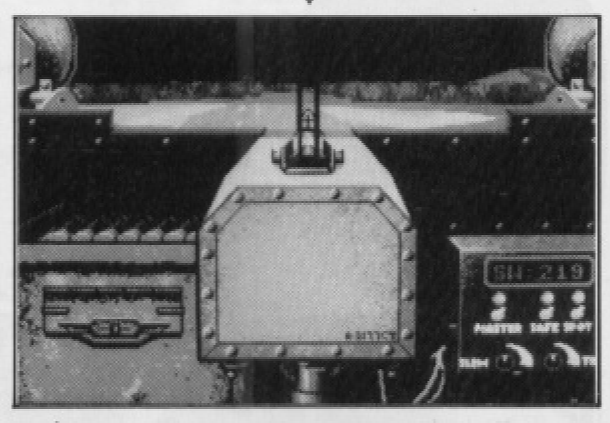




The action is mostly presented from a first-person viewpoint, with the curious fish-eye lens display causing occasional confusion. An alternative view option allows you to watch the action from a chase boat, but don't spend too long admiring the scenery: in this mode your gunners hold fire and the pilot is computer-controlled.



Discover a tank or helicopter and it's time to make full speed in the opposite direction: the amount of damage you cause doesn't justify the amount you sustain. A sniper's small-calibre bullets don't do much harm, but a few well-placed .50 Calibre rounds can kill off other crew members and disable radar and spotlights, especially if you get ambushed.



Many of the missions are surprise attacks carried out during the night. Naturally, enemies are tougher to see and hit unless you use a spotlight, and the whole terrain is a little harder to distinguish.

PC

This exploits a middle ground between simulation and arcade action, and the result is a game which, though addictive, leaves you wanting more than you get. Don't be put off by the small screen display (similar to that in Accolade's tank game, Steel Thunder): once you are fully into piloting a boat upstream you hardly notice it. The graphics work well as a whole, but the wide-angle view is occasionally confusing (if you turn sideways, the area ahead and behind looks like a fork in the river). However, the only major drawback is that the smooth movement of a 20Mhz machine translates poorly onto a low-range PC, trading detail for speed. In its favour, the presentation is superb, including an excellent manual, in-game demonstration and practice modes, the ability to change the steering slew rate, and the option to play any one of four roles. The action itself is compulsive: whizzing around a bend in the river into a huge T55 tank or running into an enemy base full of snipers, helicopters, sampans and fortresses makes you sit up! It's a game that you can just pick up and play any time and enjoy, but after a while all the waterways begin to look familiar, and the terrain isn't diverse enough to fully generate a convincing atmosphere. Ultimately though, it hasn't the complexity to justify the price tag, nor the long-term addictiveness of a great arcade game.

PRICE	£29.99
RELEASE DATE	Out Now
GRAPHICS	70%
SOUND	73%
PLAYABILITY	80%
VALUE	64%

OVERALL 78%



Plans are for a June release, with enhanced sound effects and a natty Ride Of The Valkyries title tune comprising the only tangible differences. No price details are yet available.



This is also planned for mid-summer: the music won't be as hot, but the gameplay should translate wave for wave.

CREEK HISTORY

Before Vietnam, the US only had minimal contact with river-based warfare – during the American Civil War 100 years earlier, a fleet of tiny boats had patrolled the American coastline, but that was about the extent of US experience.

In the 1950s, French colonial forces – and the Vietnamese themselves – pointed the way to primary craft designs. In 1953, the French developed the first prototype PBR (Patrol Boat, River) craft and gave it to the Vietnamese for use as a tactical weapon.

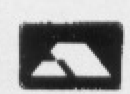
During the Vietnam war, the Americans developed their own PBRs to create the 'Brown Water Navy'. These craft were initially anchored permanently offshore, attached to and serviced by Landing Ship Tank vessels. Their missions fell into three classes: interdicting Viet Cong supply lines on the coast, flushing out guerillas in the inland Delta waters, and working in convoy with armoured troop carriers and other boats in strike force missions.

Crews made imaginative use of their time on the boats, developing strategies as well as recreational facilities. The water-skiing shown in the film Apocalypse Now is no myth: with its powerful engines and high speed, the PBR was an ideal ski–boat. Surprise tactics were most successful on night missions: crews would cut engines and drift with the current, biding time until they spotted an enemy unit nearby. Turning on the spotlights and unleashing a hail of bullets proved very effective.

Over the years there have been three major phases of American PBR development. The Mark I (1966) was small and fairly slow, with a 215hp engine. The Mark II (1967) quickly followed: slightly longer and more powerful than its predecessor, it also had protective aluminium gunwales to minimise damage when hitting rocks or other boats. Between 1967-69 over 130 Mark IIs were sent to Vietnam.

It wasn't until almost the end of the war, 1976, that the Mark III came along – with a 450hp engine and a maximum speed of 50 knots (which would give a hydrofoil a run for its money). It was also one of the most manoeuvrable craft around, able to brake from full speed to a dead stop and complete a 180-degree turn in a single boat length. Unfortunately, it was also a rather noisy beast.

By 1980, versions of the Mark III PBR could be found in the navies of Iran, Sri Lanka, Syria, Cambodia and the Phillipines. Gunboat's PBR fits both the Mark II and III specifications, but can also be customised with engines and equipment from the Mark I version to produce a tougher game.



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Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters

Atari Games' multi-level monster-basher may boast the longest coin-op title ever – but does it measure up in the gameplay stakes? Kati Hamza investigates.



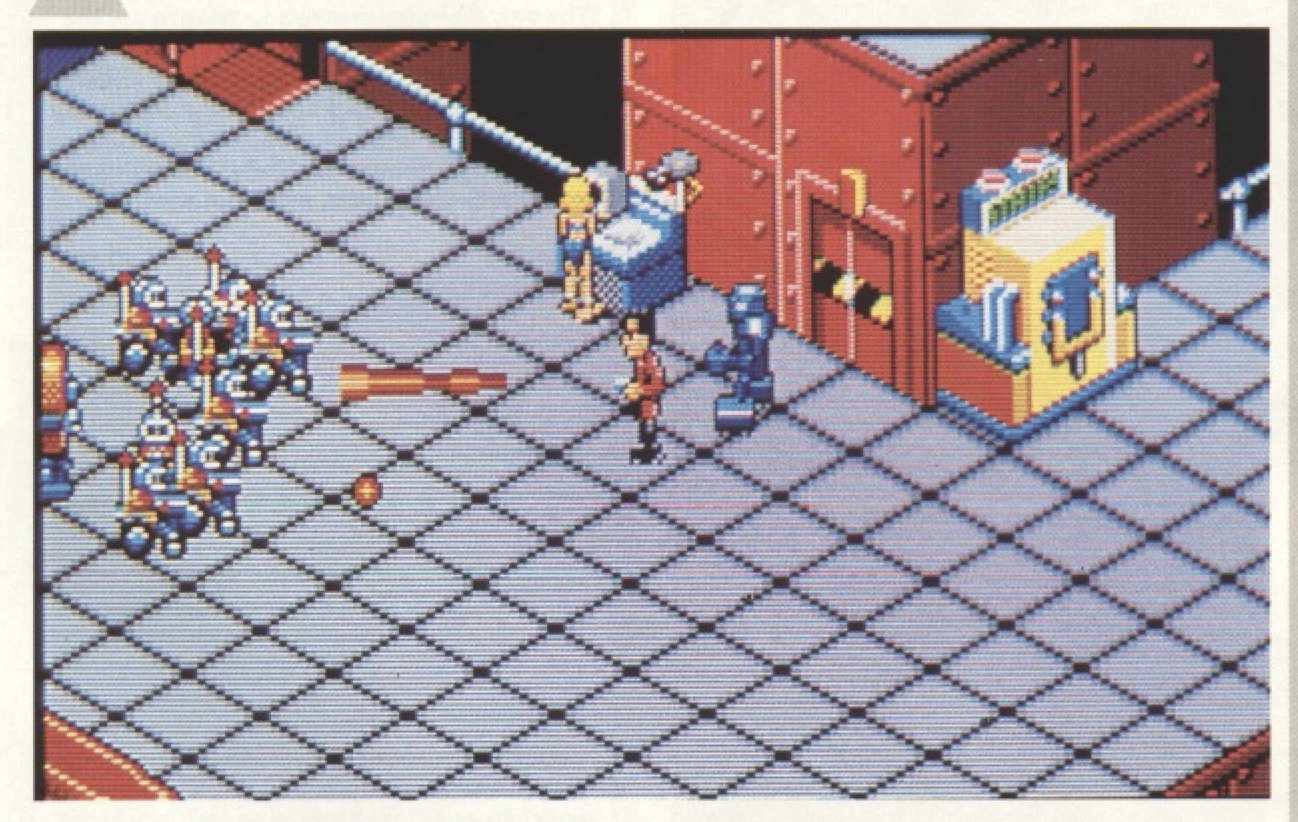


The introductory sequence is a faithful rendition of the Tengen coin-op's. It looks like a comic strip and sounds like a science fiction B-movie, which generates exactly the right atmosphere for this off-beat, zany kind of game.

Evil Reptilons have taken over Planet X and brainwashed its human colonists – including their leader, Sarah Bellum – into producing an unspeakably vicious army of Robo-Zombies. Unless somebody stops them, and soon, they'll be in a position to take over the Earth!

Enter Jake and Duke, professional interplanetary SWAT team and all-round regular cool guys. These boys have seen some pretty hot action and a bunch of tin cans on legs isn't going to put them off.

Shades at the ready, chewing extra strong gum, they head for the big X in the sky. Will the hostages ever return? Will Sarah Bellum live? Or are the repulsive Reptilons doomed to bring an end to all that is good, decent and American on our island Earth?



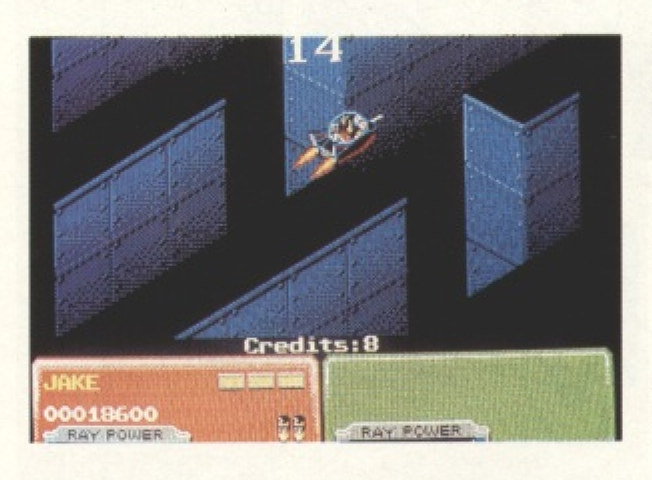


Each factory has several storeys, and to get to most of them you have to activate the ElectroStairs. This is achieved by flicking an unobtrusive switch exactly like the one above.

Robo-Zombies vary in size and shape from cute little K-9 lookalikes to family size bullet-belching bad guys. The post-annihilation green crystals that they leave behind improve your weapon's ray power – though in some situations bombs make snappier work of robot-clearing. There's just one unsolved mystery – why did the Reptilons build half their army from Weetabix?

Shooting cupboards can either give you a pleasant tingly feeling or a nasty surprise. The tingling comes from finding an energy boost, nabbing extra bomb supplies or rescuing a hostage. Explosions and marauding droids are even more horrible alternatives.

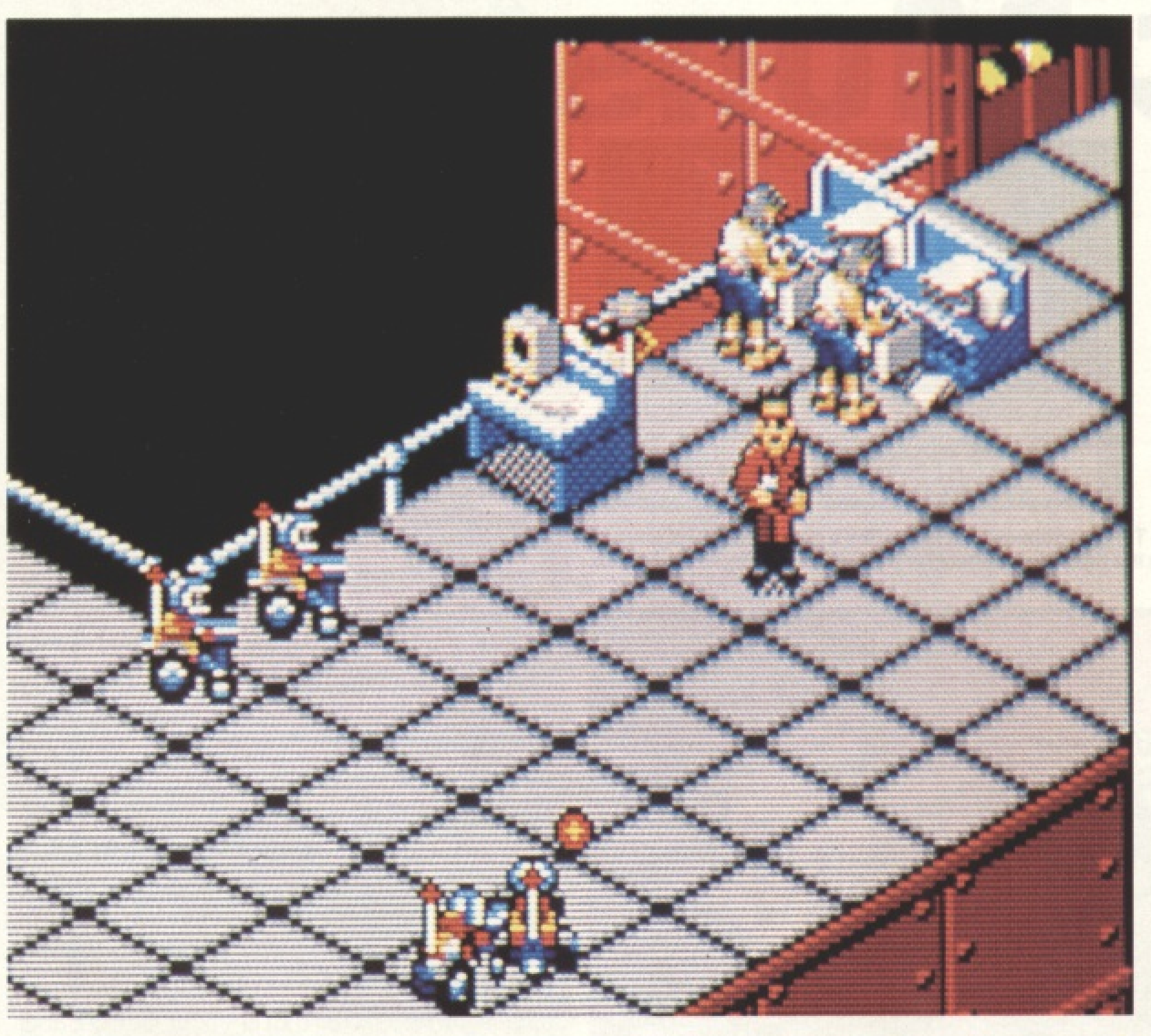




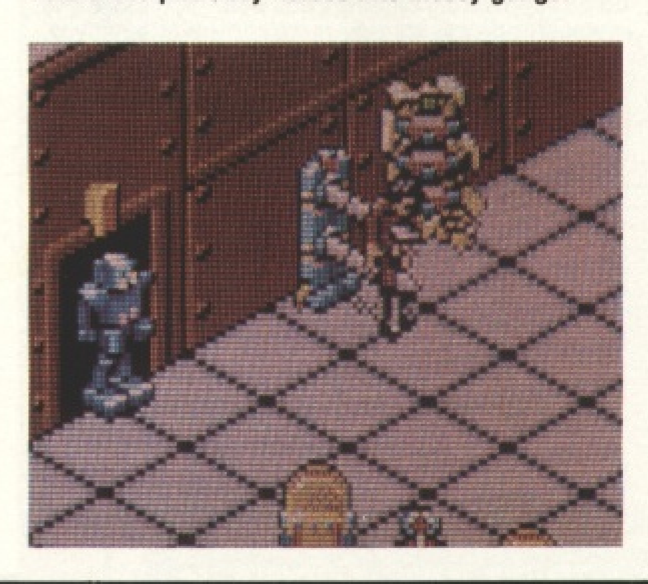
Speed is your objective here in the canal zone which appears every four levels. Find your way through the passages in record time and you heap up a load of bonus points.

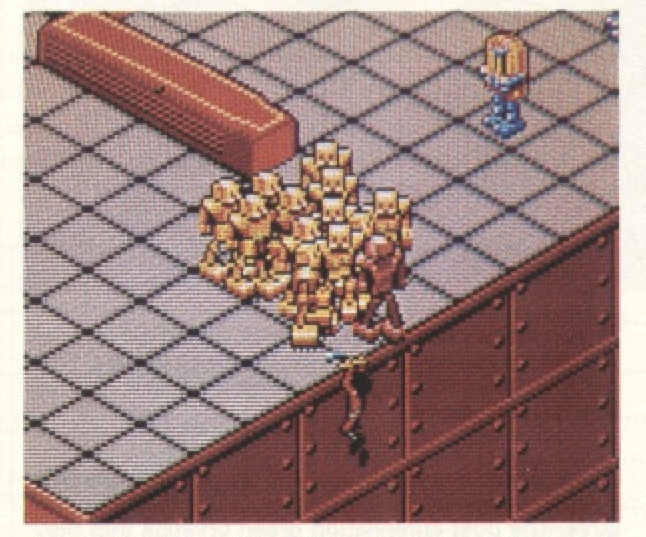
Each factory provides its own end-of-level confrontation with a suitably hideous, over-sized Reptilon. The Big Boys have their own particular fighting speciality, but the secret of getting rid of them all is to make liberal and indiscriminate use of bombs.

There's total equality on Planet X... the humans are zombies too. The only way to bring them to their senses is to go up and give them a nudge – Scotty then automatically beams them up to the orbiting rescue-ship.

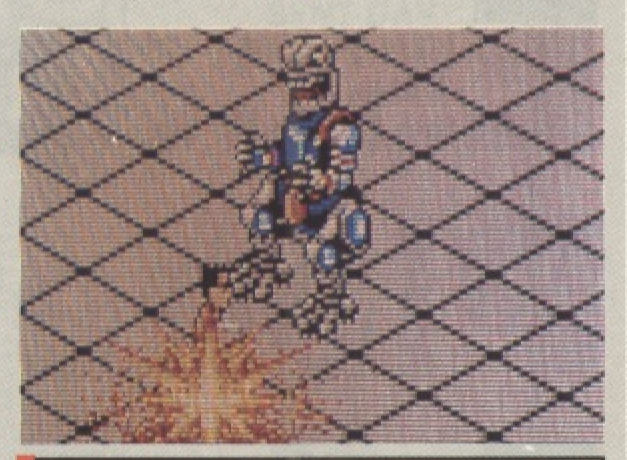


What a way to go! Gut-wrenching spikes aren't the only way to come to a sticky end though: electric floors, moving barriers and floating electroid spheres are patented Reptilon designs guaranteed to turn heroic interplanetary heroes into messy gunge.





Oops! One false step and you could be holding your life in your hands. Actually, this is a purely cosmetic cliff-hanger – you are completely under the computer's control and you always manage to pull yourself up. Phew!





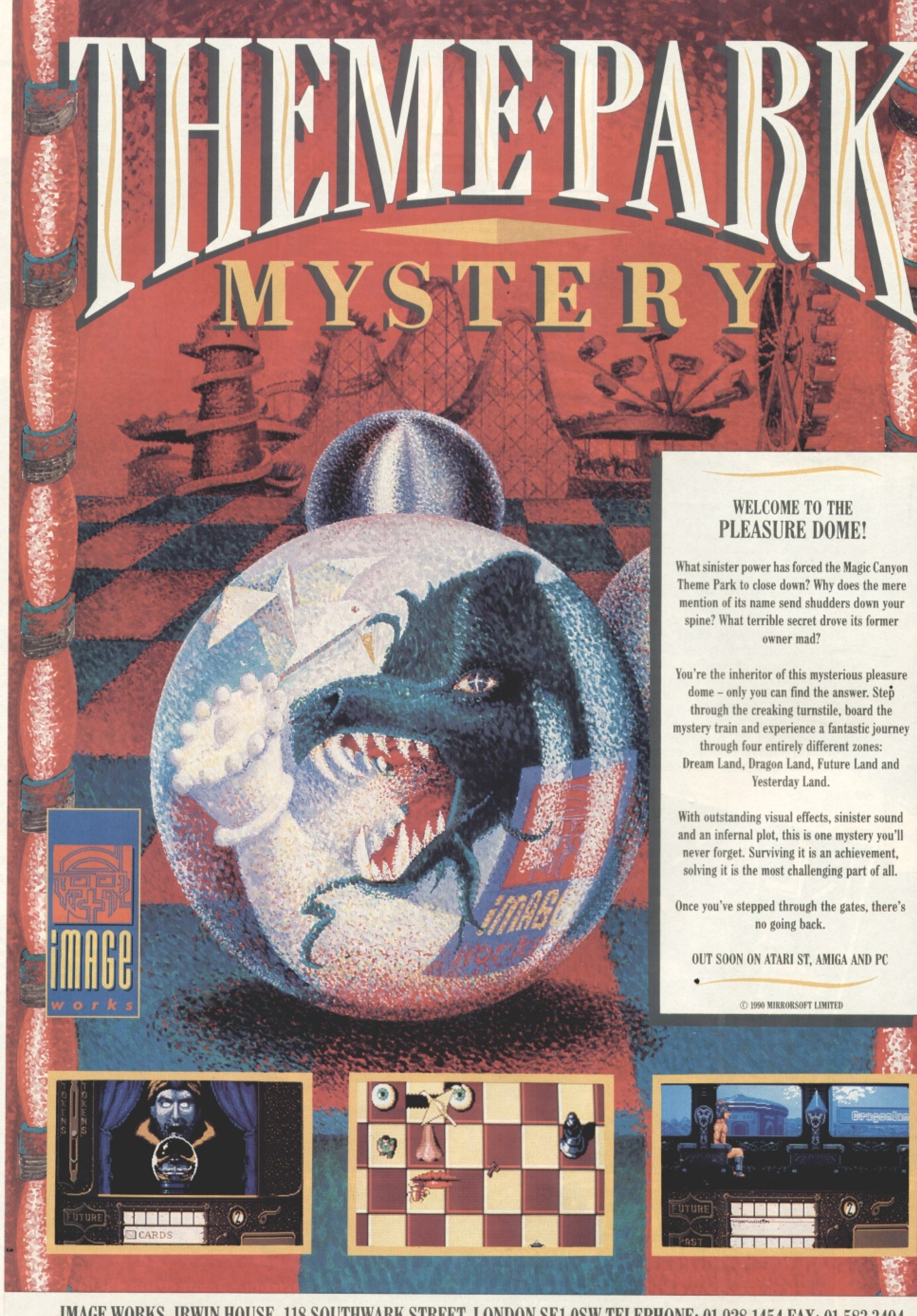
ST Huge metal factories, man-sized reptiles, terrified hostages, awesome Robo-Zombies – all the essential ingredients of melodramatic science fiction in fact – were captured brilliantly in the coin-op. And apart from the sound, this version of **Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters** is an almost perfect conversion – right down to the push scrolling. The robots are surprisingly cute, the heroes boast comic-style animation and the factories create a suitably tacky B-movie atmosphere. It's true that the gameplay is repetitive, but as it comes in short action-packed bursts followed by a variety of totally different end-of-level baddies it hardly seems to matter. It's also surprisingly tough – the copious credits may seem generous, but you end up wishing for more. The only real niggles involve having to use the keyboard to fire bombs (awkward in mid-fight) and some rather jerky push-scrolling in the canal sections. Apart from that, this is one of the most accurate conversions you are ever likely to see: a great solo romp that's even more fun with two.

PRICE	£19.99
RELEASE DATE	May
GRAPHICS	85%
SOUND	74%
PLAYABILITY	86%
VALUE	83%
OVERALL	**84%**

A Expected to hit your screens at exactly the same time, the Amiga version is graphically identical to the ST. There are significant differences in the sound department though: sampled speech accompanies the introductory sequence before a specially composed Amiga soundtrack kicks in. And all of this for no extra cost – this version is priced at £19.99 as well.



PC Come May, PC heroes will be able to show those ruthless reptiles exactly what they are made of – or at least as much as you can show in CGA and EGA. This version is expected to cost an extra fiver on either 3½" or 5¼" formats.


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Code-name: Iceman

"There's no rest for the wicked! Here I am, soaking up the sun in Tahiti, getting to grips with the local girls (if you know what I mean), when my boss calls saying something about a mission in Tunisia. I'm not stupid, I've kept track of the news. Tunisia is at the centre of an oil struggle between the two superpowers and a Russian-backed terrorist group has just kidnapped the American ambassador. Sounds like a conspiracy to me."

"I should have known this vacation was gonna be trouble right from the start. Even a simple game of volleyball ends up with me saving some poor girl's life thanks to a hasty bit of mouth-to-mouth. Still, orders are orders, so, saying goodbye to Stacey (a tasty brunette I picked up on the dance floor), I grab my ID, take a dinghy off the island and hop on the first flight home."

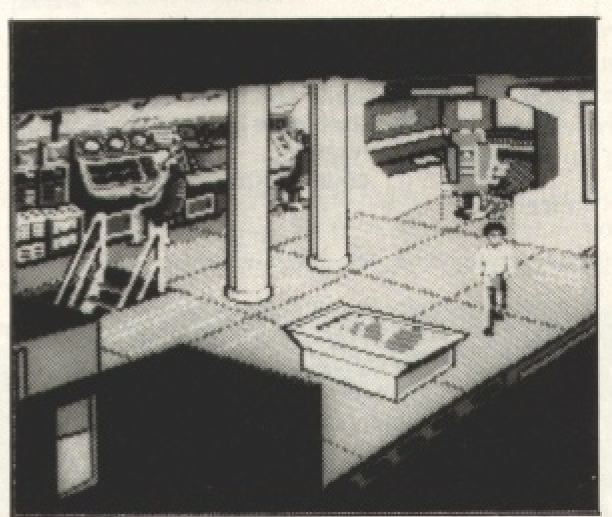
The name's Presley, Paul Presley. Licensed to kill, captain submarines and rescue ambassadors... oh, and play Sierra adventures.

Like all Sierra adventures, this is an interactive movie of sorts, complete with animated sequences and complemented by cinema-style effects and music. Strangely though, underneath all of this cinematic icing, the cake is usually little more than a standard text adventure (albeit a classy one).

The star – your on-screen alter ego – is moved via keyboard, joystick or mouse, with his ramblings interrupted by action sequences: piloting a submarine and driving a van at breakneck speed along twisty turny roads to name but two.

Designed by Jim Walls, the man behind the Police Quest series, Code-name: Iceman is a tale of espionage, double dealing, back-stabbing, terrorism, international politics, superpower conflict, action and adventure.

It's a nine 5¼" (four 3½") extravaganza, with the package also including a map and a detailed manual (which acts as copy protection, as it's necessary to perform certain tasks such as saving drowning women and decoding messages from the CIA).



"After being driven to the Pentagon and dealing with that damned scatty security guard (where do they get them from?) the boss fills me in with the details. Sure enough, the ambassador's being held in Tunisia and yours truly has to bust him out. I'm assigned to a brand new, silent-running, nuclear-attack submarine to get me there – and get this, my Tunisian contact is none other than that brunette, Stacey. She must have been in Tahiti to make initial contact... and what contact!"

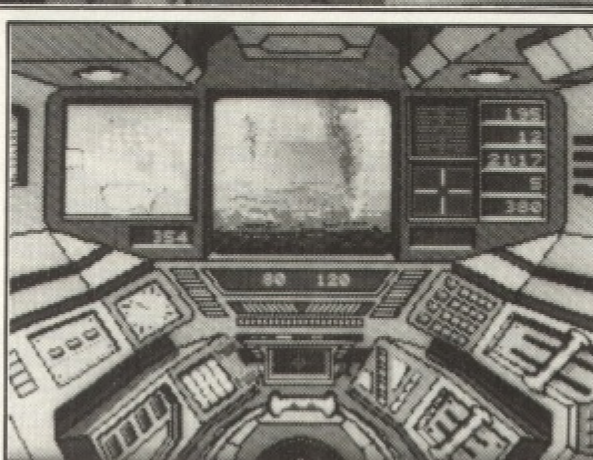
"Arriving at Pearl Harbour and boarding the sub, I meet up with John Hawkins, the Captain. Early fifties, grey hair, balding in the middle – he could have come straight out of the movies. He guides me through the controls, throttle, ballast, rudder – it all comes back to me from the training school days. He guides me to our first radio point, where we review the mission's specific sailing orders and I get to work plotting the waypoints on the computerised navigational charts, trying to keep the distance to a minimum. Our course takes us through the Bering Straits, where we encounter our first taste of enemy action."





"After getting a bit too excited about the prospect of gunfire the captain slips and falls onto his head. In his state it knocks him right out, so I'm left on my own with a Russian destroyer bearing down on us. Thankfully I had earlier found and repaired a major fault in the torpedo room. I hate to think what would have happened if we had to go up against the enemy with no weapons! A tense waiting game leads to a exchange of missiles which leaves the destroyer as little more than flotsam and jetsam."

"Now that I'm in charge of the sub, I guide her through a field of icebergs, dodge submarines and hide underneath the USS Coontz in order to get into the port of Tunisia – and all this before the Captain regains consciousness. Along the way I decoded further instructions sent by Washington, gambled with some of the crew (the things they'll gamble away are incredible) and carried out countless other duties."





"Once into Tunisia's Harbour we're blocked by a gunboat sealing off the entrance. Looks like it's time for me to leave the submarine behind, so I decide to cause a major distraction to allow me to slip into the harbour undetected. So now I'm waiting here patiently under the water, having made the agent's contact signal, waiting for my diversion to blow. It's got to go soon, time's running out."

PC

The first thing that most people watch for in Sierra games these days is the opening sequence – so it's a little disappointing that there isn't one to speak of here. However, those of you with a sound board are treated to a few low-pitched slide effects leading to a jolly tune during the credits and plenty of other atmospheric musical scores throughout. In-game, the pace is well worked out: it's a fairly light-hearted affair on the beach, but becomes very tense as the mission unfolds. A sense of atmosphere is never lacking – even the submarine's claustrophobic feel is achieved without becoming off-putting. There are points though (especially towards the end of the submarine section), where the player's interest does take a bit of a dive – probably because the action remains in roughly the same location for too long a time. Tedium can also set in during the dice game, with what starts out as a nice idea soon becoming irritatingly difficult (if not downright boring). The fact that logic is thrown out of the window and a purely random element arrives just doesn't fit in with the game, especially as a vital piece of equipment can only be obtained by successful gambling. Another, minor, thorn in the rose comes during the diving sequence: sparse graphics and a seemingly irrelevant direction indicator all lead to lowering the, thus far, professional image. However, Sierra has put a lot of thought into the game controls: gone (except in one case) are the 'Come a little closer' messages when you want to pick something up – the character now automatically performs the action. Also gone are the 'Examine this, Examine that' commands – now a click of the right mouse button brings up a description of the relevant item. There's no doubt that Sierra has a classy product here, however it could have done with a little more polish in certain places.

PRICE	£44.99
RELEASE DATE	Early April
GRAPHICS	84%
SOUND	80%
PLAYABILITY	82%
VALUE	70%
OVERALL	**80%**



There's a six-month shore leave until Commodore versions set sail with what should be identical in every respect – except, of course, the music sound effects.



Atari owners will have to suffer the same six-month delay as their Amiga-using chums, with their version once again differing only in the sound department.





Persian Gulf Inferno

Gary Whitta goes terrorist-toppling with Gremlin and Magic Bytes.

The world's in danger – again. With a chronic oil shortage combining with escalating tensions between the superpowers, the planet's on the brink of either a fatal energy shortage or nuclear catastrophe – or both. And as if the situation wasn't bad enough, a group of fanatical terrorists have seized control of a major oil platform in the Persian Gulf.

Taking the rig's crew hostage and planting an atomic bomb inside the main body of the platform, the terrorists are threatening to detonate the bomb unless their demands are met.

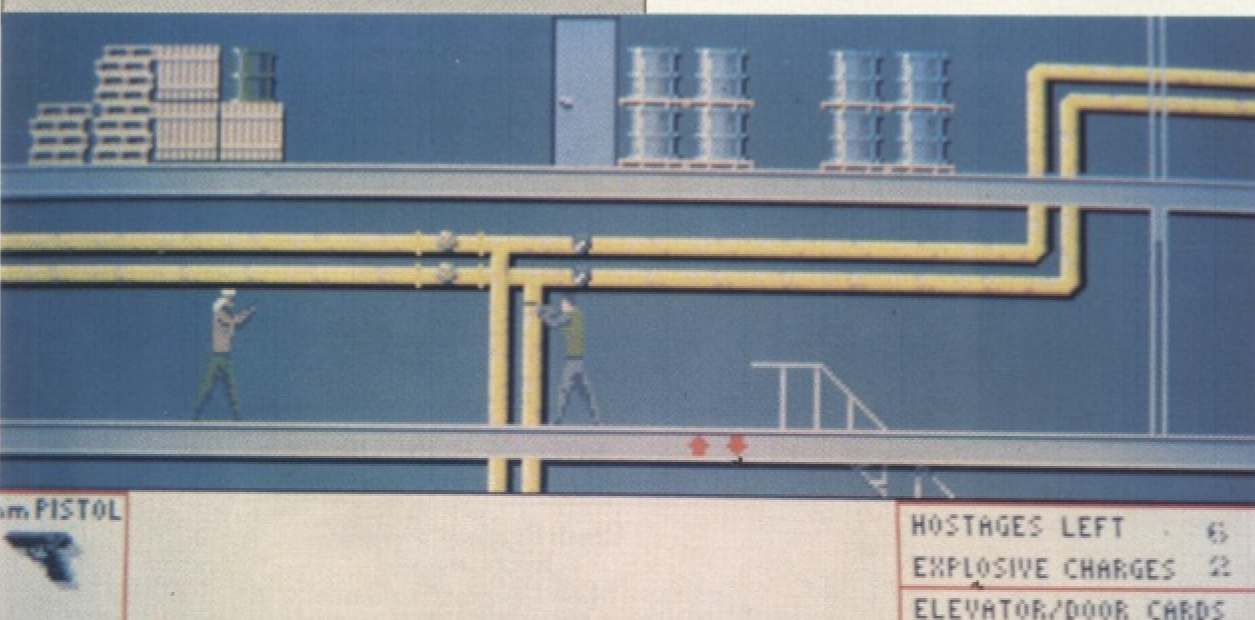
And of course we can't have that, so a team of crack commandos immediately sets off to the scene of the 'disturbance' by helicopter to rescue the hostages and disarm the bomb before it's too late. But when both choppers accidentally collide en route, the entire team is killed before they even arrive.

Except one man. You (who else?) managed to scramble out before the chopper exploded, and made the rest of the journey to the rig in an inflatable dinghy. Scrambling onto the platform with only a handful of equipment rescued from the wreckage, your one-man quest to save the free world begins...

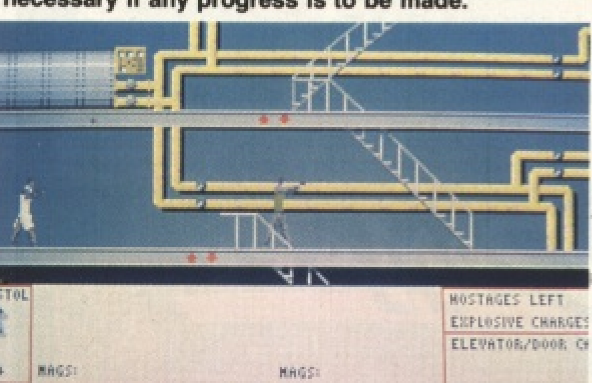
Careful door-to-door searching is the key. Many of the rooms you search are empty, but others yield useful items – weapons, ammunition and explosive charges (for opening stubborn doors) are all waiting to be found, as are key cards for locked doors and the elevators that get you about faster than the stairways. Later rooms hide the hostages themselves – you can tell them by the high level of terrorist activity around them.



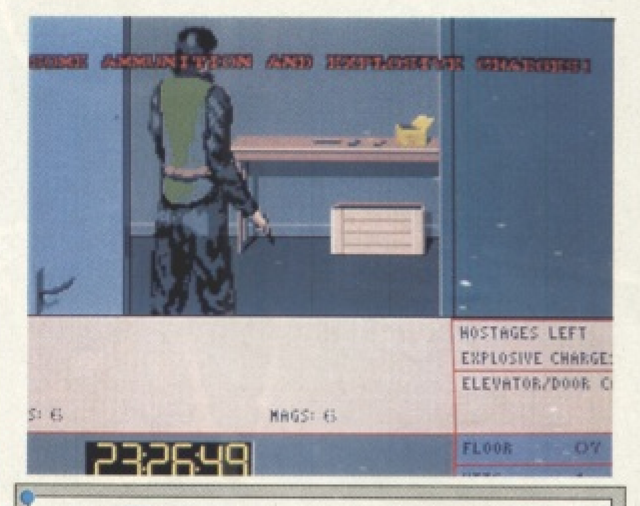
Combat with terrorists is great fun. Most of them have fixed positions, so with a bit of practice you can get to know where they are and be ready for them. Others, however, appear totally randomly and can often take you by surprise – partly because you can only see them when they're on the same floor as you. When you're confronted by one, he screams something in Arabic before opening fire – they're all armed with sub-machine guns. The weapon you're currently carrying, combined with your own reaction speed, determines how quickly you can knock him out, and when you do so, his head jerks back as his brains fly out the back of his skull. Not a pretty sight.



Time is short – you've got just 35 minutes before the bomb explodes at midnight, so there's no room for dawdling. In that time you've got to rescue all six groups of hostages before finding and defusing the bomb. The oil rig's size doesn't help. It's 20 stories high in some places, and its maze-like layout makes a map necessary if any progress is to be made.



At the outset, you're armed only with a 9mm automatic pistol and a handful of magazines, but by careful exploration of all the rooms in the complex, you can get your hands on some much meatier weaponry. Hidden behind one of the earlier doors is a Spas Franchi 12 Pump-action shotgun, while an Uzi SMG is waiting to be found later on. Swapping between weapons at the right times is vital, as some are better suited to certain situations than others. The pistol is fast, but it takes two shots to kill a terrorist with it. The shotgun blows away a terrorist with one shot, but the pump mechanism is slow to reload, so it's not too good when the action hots up. The Uzi is the best for all-round devastation – you can clear a whole corridor with one burst – but it's also greedy on ammo, and so isn't effective for long.



A For a game of German origins, a game like Persian Gulf Inferno is extremely 'real' – although it's not the most violent game ever seen, it takes its carnage very seriously, right down to the inclusion of three existing modern-day weapons. The terrorists die horribly – they're thrown back by the force of the impact, and their brains are flung all over the place. In fact, as nasty as it may seem, this no-holds-barred depiction of the action adds a great sense of realism and makes knocking-off the terrorists all the more satisfying. It's not particularly polished – the graphics are at best functional, although there are some nice animation effects, and there are some annoying bugs, like terrorists who appear floating OUTSIDE the oil rig, but there's nothing you can't live (or die) with. An atmospheric soundtrack adds to the enjoyment – the terrorists shout at you in Arabic, and the weapons sound like they should. The only major gripe is that, given the size of the oil rig, it should be quite a big challenge, put providing you're willing to make a map, it's not particularly difficult to complete. All the same, it's an enjoyable slice of action that at the very least gives us an idea of what Die Hard SHOULD have been like on computer.

PRICE	£19.99
RELEASED	Out Now
GRAPHICS	78%
SOUND	80%
PLAYABILITY	82%
VALUE	75%
OVERALL	**78%**



Atari Inferno is to all intents and purposes identical to the Amiga version, with only very slight changes in the sound department. It's out now at a price of 19.99



There are no plans at present for a PC version, but there's no telling what might happen if the Amiga and ST versions take off. Don't hold your breath though...

COMBO RACER™





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Combo Racer is probably the fastest 3D racing game available for the home computer making this a must for speed freaks.

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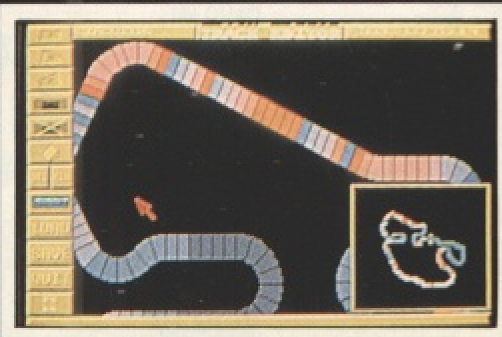


Screen shots from various versions.





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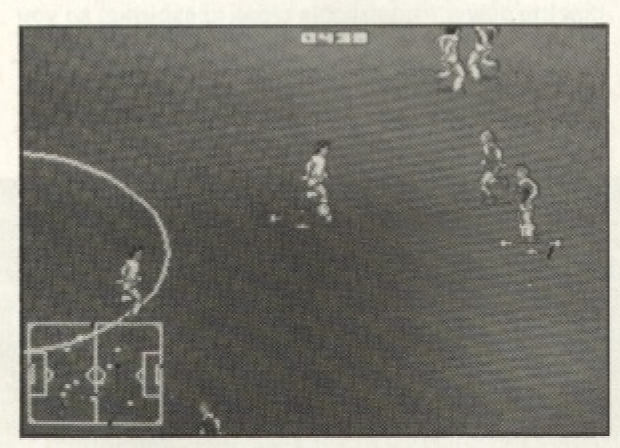
MANCHESTER UNITED

(Krisalis)

Teque's very own red devil Dean Lester kicks off with a few choice tips for budding Fergies.

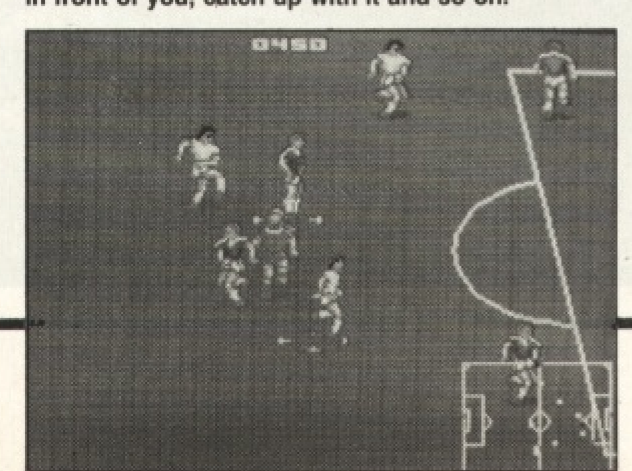


▲Playing games is not only essential for progression – it also comes in mighty handy for rooting out any players who aren't performing particularly well. Look for anybody who isn't pulling his weight for some reason, and then review his training programme accordingly (poor training is more often than not the reason behind his poor performance). Goalkeepers in particular, need to be watched.

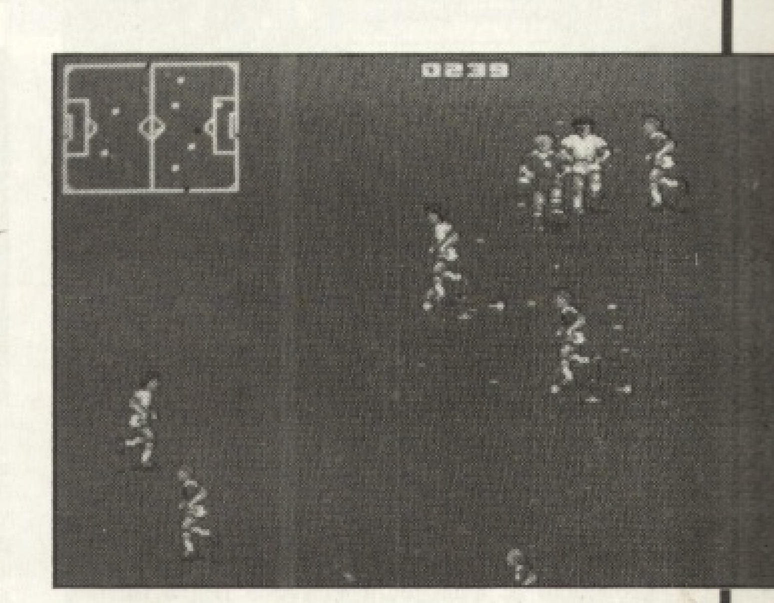


▲You'll find that many players are pretty slow on the ball, and it's when you're in control of one of these that it's best to play a passing game as much as possible. Don't try to run with the ball as the defence will catch you every time.

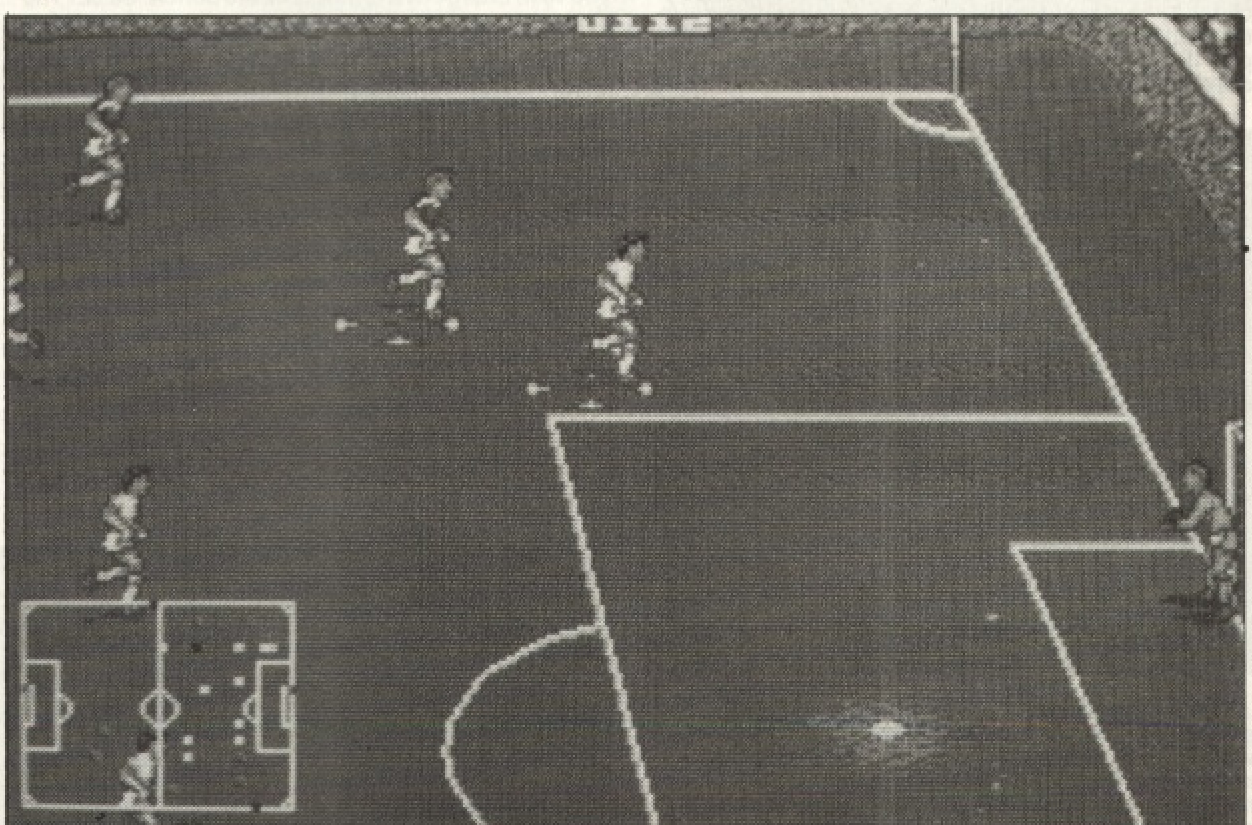
▲Similarly, don't attempt to play a running game if your team as a whole is pretty slow. Players run slower than normal when they're on the ball, so it's best to adopt 'chip and chase' tactics, where you kick the ball in front of you, catch up with it and so on.

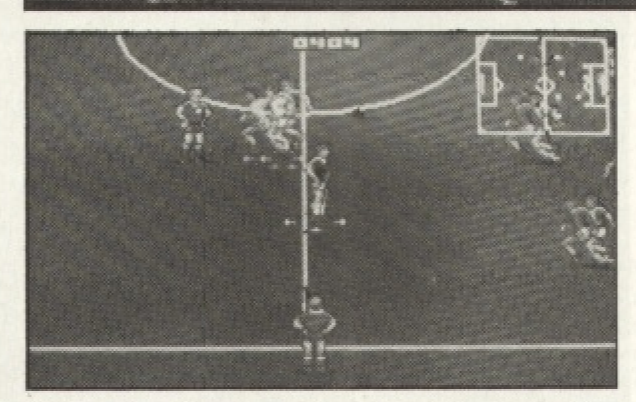


▲The scanner is a lot more useful than many players appreciate – in fact it's an essential passing tool. Use it as much as you can to highlight players that are ready to move forward into open space and to avoid areas filled with opposing players. It's a bit like a crystal ball in a sense, allowing you to see things in your mind just before they happen and so be prepared for them. And don't worry about the scanner being obscured by the action on the pitch – it moves automatically into the corner of the screen that's most quiet to give you the best view at all times.

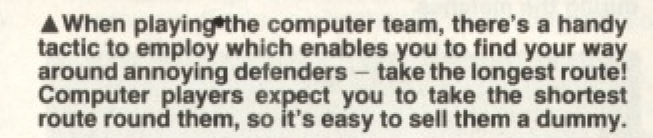


▲And Smith must score! Or must he? Well, only if he knows exactly what he's doing. Like a lot of contemporary soccer simulations, you'll find that diagonals always work best against the keepers, as the they have a hard time with the unusual angle of approach. The best place to shoot from is just outside the box, and up into the corner of the goal – if it's on target the keeper will have a very hard time diving for it. Oh, and don't waste your time with any fancy 'dribbling round the keeper' tricks. The goalies here are far too shrewd for that caper and will just take the ball straight off you.

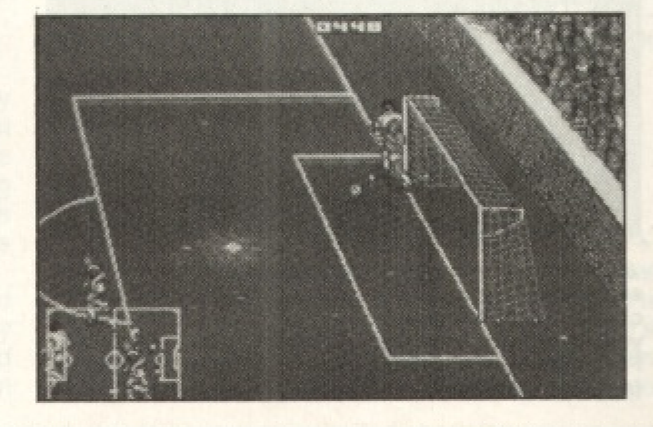




▲As nasty as it may sound, you should try to play dirty as much as possible. It's well worth chopping down the opposition if only to break up his flow of play – at best you could stop a potentially lethal attack before it's too late. The worst you're ever likely to come up against is a free kick, but a lot of the time you'll get away with it completely!



▲When playing the computer team, there's a handy tactic to employ which enables you to find your way around annoying defenders – take the longest route! Computer players expect you to take the shortest route round them, so it's easy to sell them a dummy.



TIPS

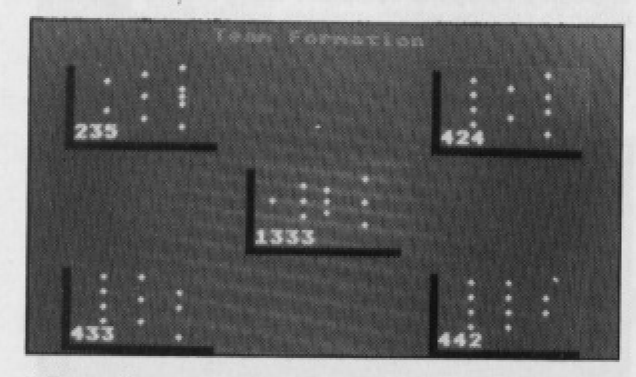
PLAYER MANAGER

(Anco)

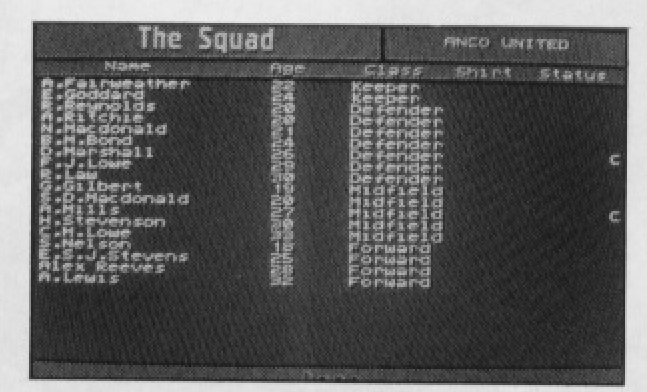
Anco's own Anul Gupta blows the whistle on the managerial sequel to Kick Off, with a helping hand for any struggling soccer bosses.

▲Training is vital – without it, your team will perform like a bunch of geriatric wallies. It's a time–consuming procedure to make sure everyone has a training program for that week, but if you want to stay with a chance you simply HAVE to do it. And make sure you go through the entire squad, not just the team you want to play in the next game, as you can never be sure as to exactly who will be playing.

▲When buying players, always bid less than the asking price, as the club that's selling the player you want is obviously quite keen to get rid of him. And to make sure that your funds are topped up at all times, make sure you've always got plenty of players up for sale. You can root out the ones that are best to get rid of during the matches.

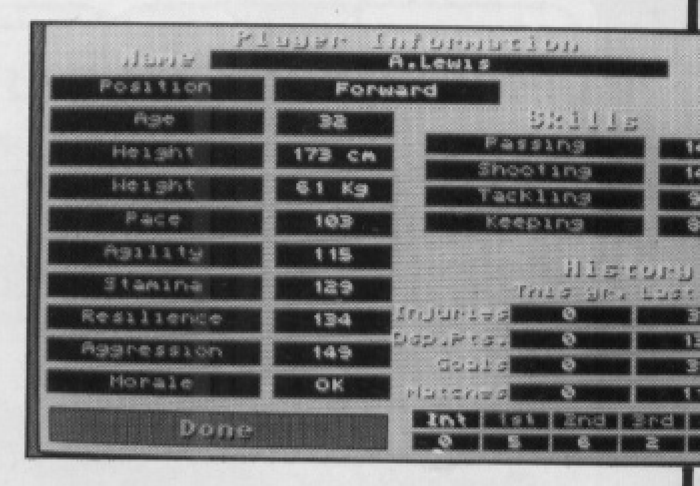


▲Formation selection is always important, but something that's often overlooked. When making this choice, you should select a formation that caters to your team's style the best by covering its weak areas. For example, if your team is weak in defence, select a formation that has a strong defensive line-up.

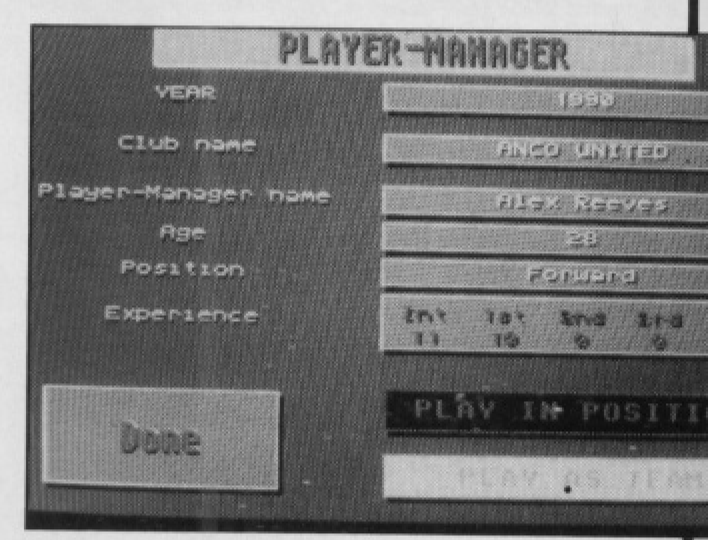


▲When you start for the first time, take your time to have a leisurely peruse through all the options, so as to familiarise yourself with all that's going on and why. You've got all the time in the world, so have a look through the various divisions and so on to see just where everyone is an where you stand. Your first task as manager is to get your squad sorted – at the outset you're in charge of a rather horrible bunch. Select The Team and go carefully through your squad, weeding out all unsuitable players. The worst players are the ones that are getting on a bit, anyone over the age of 28 or 29 can be classified as an old duffer and is best gotten rid of immediately. You'll find that the older players are slow, lack ball skill and control and are generally pretty useless. So you should take them as quickly as possible to...

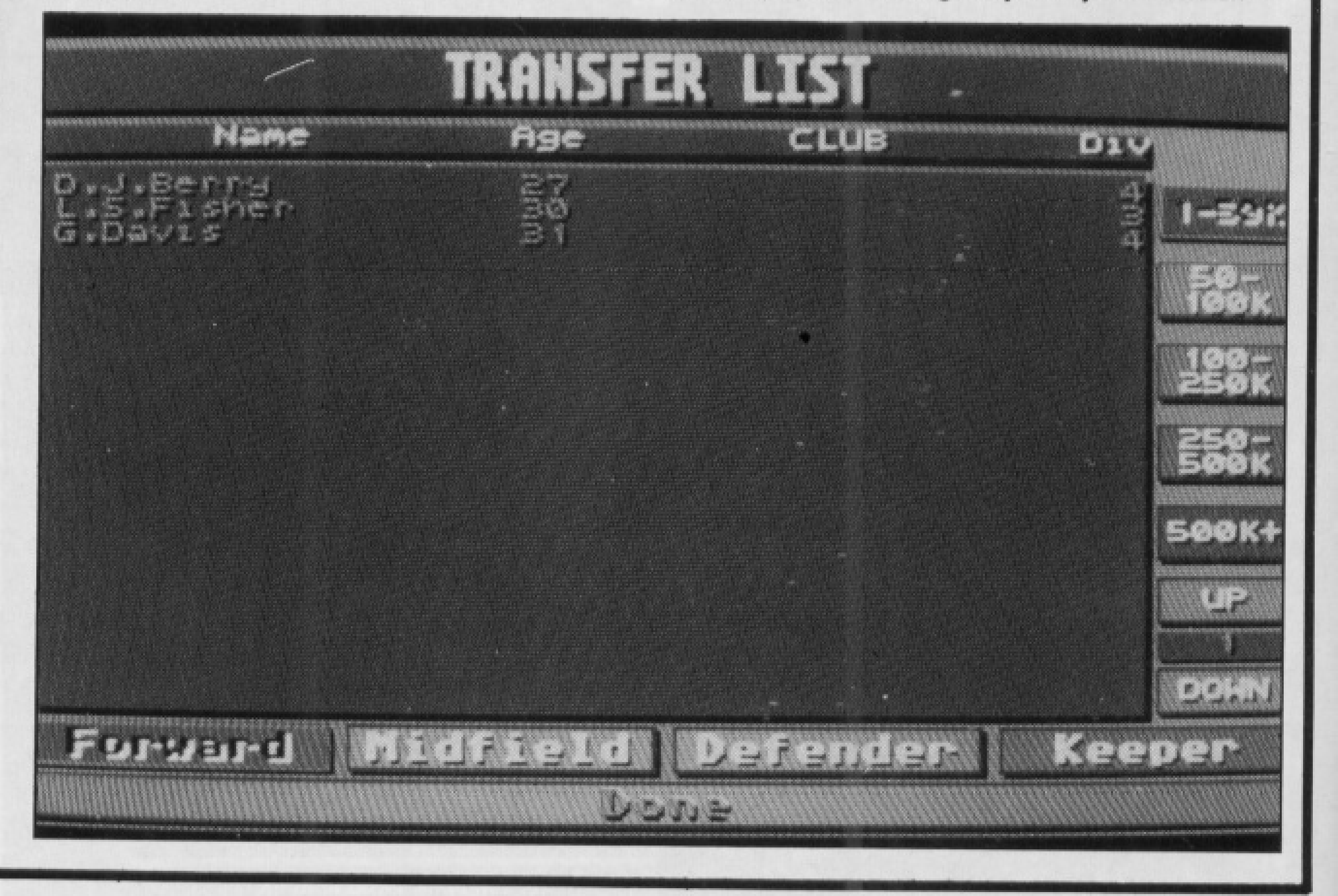
▲...the transfer market, where your 'past the sell-by date' payers can be disposed of. Put them up for sale straight away and they'll be snapped up pretty quickly, meaning you get some much–needed cash in the bank to buy in better players. But don't go charging too much for them, as computer managers are always on the lookout for bargains. Check out the fourth division, and see what's up for sale there. Most of the players there are good value for what they offer, and if you're willing to look around you'll find some excellent bargains.



▲When looking at an individual player's statistics, the one you should pay most attention to is Agility – it's the most important of the lot. While other statistics don't really have an effect on any of the others, Agility serves as the moderator for all the statistics. Speed, Skill and so on are all affected by the player's Agility rating.



▲Keep an eye out while looking at the team, for a T icon to appear by a player's name. This symbol means that the player's contract is close to expiring, so you must act quickly. Either offer the player a new contract if you want to keep him (which he will either accept or reject) or sell him off. If a player's contract expires, he is given a compulsory free transfer, which means you lose the player and don't get any money for him either.



Midwinter



It's snow joke trying to negotiate Rainbird's winter wonderland. Don't feel bitter. Designer-programmer Mike Singleton is at hand to help break the ice and provide food for thaw-t as he froze some light on the subject.

GET TO A GARAGE!

When the game starts, Captain Stark finds himself slap bang in the middle of an enemy unit. He only has his skis and a rifle and a handful of grenades to fight off the enemy and aircraft.

Although Stark could stand and fight (and do considerable damage to the enemy unit), the first few hours are crucial in recruiting other people – so Stark must move quickly.

Consult the map to find the nearest garage and head for it as quickly as possible. Don't engage enemy vehicles, and pause only to snipe at the aircraft that constantly harass. Once you reach the garage, leap into the snow-buggy and race off to recruit new members for your team. You can deal with the enemy later.

If there's no garage reasonably close at hand, hang-gliding will get Stark quickly across difficult terrain, so make for the nearest cable-car station. During the cable-car journey up the mountain, Stark rests before his flight – an added bonus.

HARMLESS OR HUNTED?

The enemy bombers and spotter planes freely roam around the skies of Midwinter, seeking out your team. Naturally, their activity is more intense the closer you get to the enemy HQ at Shining Hollow, but they also have orders to hunt down the more dangerous or important members of the Free Villages Peace Force.

Captain Stark is the most wanted man of all, and so he's hounded by enemy aircraft right to the very end of the game. At the other end of the scale, old Mrs Randles and the two children rarely suffer from air attacks. In general, civilians have a low priority in enemy air attacks, whilst the higher ranking offices in the FVPF are favourite targets.

In addition, the more inconspicuous your vehicle, the less prone you are to air attack. Sniping attracts least attention from aircraft, followed closely by skiing, then hang-gliding and finally snow-buggying, which brings the enemy aircraft swarming like hornets.

THE TEAM SPIRIT

Getting a good team together is virtually essential – although it's conceivable that you might defeat General Masters with just one or two people, it's a very risky strategy to adopt (remember: two's company – freeze a crowd). With a team of a dozen or more, you can assign some members to engage

enemy snow-buggies, others to sabotage, a few to further recruitment and a handful to strike against General Masters' HQ.

The quicker you recruit a sizeable team the better. In the early stages of the game, it's advisable to devote nearly all of your current team to recruiting new members. You should then find that your recruiting drive works rather like a chain letter. If each new team member recruits just two more members, the strength of your team doubles at each stage.

It's vital to bear in mind the personalities and the likes and dislikes of the people you recruit. Grazzini, the hang-glider pilot, for instance, is miserable and grumpy, but female company cheers him up no end! Sarah Maddocks or Virginia Caygill will have no trouble recruiting him. The lone hunter, Rudel, an excellent sniper, refuses to join anyone except his apprentice, young Davy Hart.



BANDITS AT THREE O'CLOCK

The worst danger in hang-gliding comes from enemy aircraft. They are more difficult to spot when you are in the air, especially when you bank left or right, and consequently more dangerous.

The trick is to manoeuvre gracefully when you glide – no sharp turns or dives. Look at the ground only briefly and occasionally and keep your eyes on the horizon all the time. This way, you can spot enemy aircraft before they can do any damage.

Loose off your air-to-air missile as soon as you can. If the enemy aircraft gets close in on you, its tight turns can throw your missile off track and you will find it difficult to line up again on the enemy if he's circling around you. If an aircraft gets close in, that's the time to start making sharp turns until you can bring him into your sights again.

A word of warning – flying close to the ground gives you extra lift and thus extra speed, but it also obscures the horizon, hiding attacking aircraft behind the hills and mountainsides. Always find a suitable compromise between speed and safety.

A REAL CLIFF–HANGER

Valleys are a bit of a nuisance for hang-gliders. The up-draught drops rapidly away and, unless you are an expert pilot, you have to land after a fairly short distance. So, getting from A to B needs a little planning. Stick to mountain ridges, even if this means making a long detour, and when you do have to cross a valley, make sure you do so at the narrowest point.

Alternatively, the coastline of the island can be exploited by hang-gliders. The vast cliffs on the shoreline give truly massive lift to any hang-glider, and by hugging the coast, you can travel an incredible distance. A good candidate for such an expedition is Iwamoto, the Zen Buddhist Constable at Millpond Flats. He is extremely fit and good at virtually everything, hang-gliding included. Chabrun, the hunter, is another possibility.



Both these characters live close to Thunder Mountain, where there's a cable-car run and hang-gliders galore at the top station. From there, it's just a short flight to the cliffs of Thunder Bay. Turning south at the coast, you can cliff-hang almost to the doors of General Masters' HQ – if you can survive the trip.

Crossing water in a hang-glider is tricky. There's no lift at all, so you must gain as much height as you can by circling over the cliffs to begin with. Flying across straits or a large bay is best done by island-hopping. Small rocky islets are dotted around the coastline. Using the up-draught found at these tiny islands, you can boost your altitude and keep your feet dry!

KRISTIANSEN CALLING!

Professor Kristiansen is the only character able to transmit a distress call on the radio. By doing this, he can recruit up to four new team members. However, you must first recruit Kristiansen and then get him to a radio station.

The cantankerous Professor dislikes authority in all its guises and rejects any approach by Captain Stark and other officers. His grandson, Davy Hart, Davy's girlfriend Jenny or his ski teacher, Virginia Caygill, are all likely candidates for recruiting Kristiansen.

Unfortunately, Kristiansen is not a good skier. He gets tired and injured easily, and is also a prime target for enemy air attacks. To get him to a radio station safely, you really need to get him in a snow-buggy. It's a good idea to take him as a passenger – the frequency of enemy air attacks depends on the driver, not the passengers, so this is one way of sneaking him through the enemy air-cover (providing the driver is a pretty harmless chap).

ON THE PISTE

Cross-country skiing is best over fairly gentle terrain. Having reached skiing speed, you can carry on for miles and miles, the rush down each hill compensating for the fall in speed climbing it. Wherever possible, head for the smoothest route, even if this means a slight detour – the photographic map helps enormously when choosing ski routes.

In the mountains, don't try to go any real distance uphill – save that for cable-cars or hang-gliders. Downhill, you should try to ski along the gullies rather than over the ridges. This keeps your speed up and makes for a smoother, safer journey. On steep downhill runs, the problem is slowing down. Pulling back on the mouse slows you down a bit, but

it's not always sufficient to prevent a tumble as you hurtle towards a sharp upturning slope. Better speed control comes from 'traversing' – zigzagging across a steep slope rather than plummeting straight down it.

Dealing with enemy aircraft depends on your terrain. If you are in open, flat countryside, take hold of your rifle and start sniping straight away. If you are on a downhill run, it may be best to keep going. At maximum speed (around 70 mph), you can actually outrun the aircraft, whose manoeuvres are hampered by the rough terrain. However, if you stop, that same rough terrain can prevent you getting a clear shot at the enemy.

An alternative tactic is to use the trees as markers, heading towards them en route whenever possible. Then, if you hear the ominous drone of an enemy vehicle, you can nip to the tree and climb it, gaining a good vantage point from which to snipe.

If you plan to use hand–grenades, make sure you get yourself up into the hills first. There's nothing worse than chasing a tempting enemy supply buggy only to find it draw steadily away from you on an uphill climb. Swooping down from the mountains onto unsuspecting supply columns in much, much better. Don't forget to swerve sharply away after you lob your grenade.

however, they understandably target you a lot quicker, so make sure the shot is accurate.

Enemy missiles can be thrown off track by extremely violent manoeuvring – sharp turns, rapid acceleration, and emergency stops for instance. Once again, it's important to keep low, flat ground for battles: choose your battlefield carefully. Start violent battle manoeuvres in rough terrain and you run a severe risk of crashing your own vehicle!

THE FINAL OBJECTIVE

Attacking the enemy HQ is never easy, whichever method you choose. However, there are some key points to bear in mind.

Make sure you stock up with dynamite before reaching Shining Hollow – you won't find any there, so you won't be able to blow up the HQ.

Don't try to ski all the way there. It's a very long journey and even the best of skiers will get exhausted.

Hang-gliding from as far away as Sierra Madre is possible but you need someone either good or excellent at hang-gliding. Also, air attacks come thick and fast as you approach Shining Hollow, so use air-to-air missiles sparingly. You can always pick up a fresh hang-glider (with fresh missiles) at one of the top cable-car stations en route. On the plus side, you won't have to engage the enemy ground units that guard the approaches to Shining Hollow.

Going by snow-buggy needs careful attention to the route. Three factors are to be borne in mind. First, keep to the low ground. Second, try to skirt around enemy armoured units at the approaches. Third, you need to head for a garage at some stage to refuel your buggy. The coastal approaches to Shining Hollow seem to offer the best combination of all these factors. Finally, choose your driver carefully. Although Stark is a good driver, he's also a prime target for air attack. Someone less conspicuous but with the necessary skill to drive at high speed is best.



KEEP ON TRUCKING

Take good care of each and every snow-buggy you find – they are a scarce resource but vital for fast movement. In particular, look carefully at the map before taking off on a journey. Snow-buggies topple over going across steep slopes, so you must keep to the low ground whenever possible. If you are forced to go across really rough terrain, look at the photographic map to pick out the smoothest path. Finally, if you have to tackle a steep slope, tackle it head-on. You won't climb it very fast but at least you won't topple over.

Tactics in battle are probably a matter of taste as much as anything else. Personally, I prefer to use the directional sound of the enemy vehicles for lining up my weapons. This way you can fire at the vehicle and destroy it before you even see it! Torpedoes are best for this tactic, since they have a broader radar scan for homing in, allowing you a greater margin of error.

The essential thing to do in battle is to destroy the enemy vehicle before it gets a chance to fire back. Enemy snow-buggies take some time to locate and target you, so you should be able to get them in sight before they fire. Once you loose off a missile,

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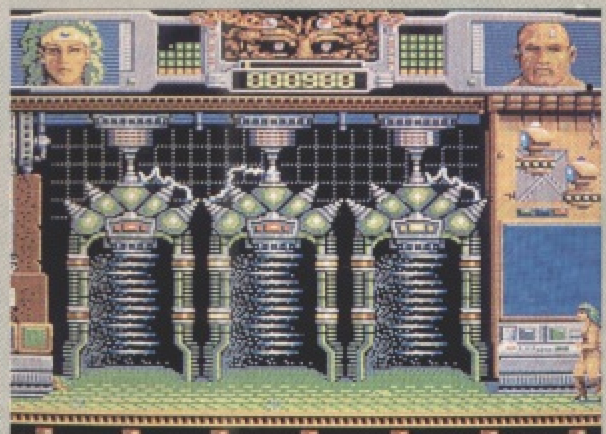
Hammerfist

Gary Penn hits the nail on the head with Vivid Image Design.

In the post-holocaust society of the 22nd century, the privileged minority no longer perform mundane tasks – in fact they don't even physically exist. With their consciousnesses stored in a huge computer, semi-solid futuristic holographic representations form the elite, leaving mechanised servants to perform the mundane chores.

The role of 'God' is played by a corporation known as Centro-Holografix. Unfortunately, it's run by a corrupt core known only as The Masters, who use modified holograms to perform evil deeds. The world is their oyster.

But there's a pearl in the shell. A malfunction has caused two holographic identities to merge – Hammerfist and Metalisis are now as one. Released from their controlling influence, the duo are out to destroy The Masters and separate themselves into solid people.



The mission begins with the Hammerfist-Metalisis meld suspended in a holding pen in an underwater complex – the control centre where holograms are formed. Breaking free they progress through the flick-screen environment: from the control centre into the hydroponic area (where they meet a very animate plant with roving tentacles), through an airlock out into the water (no, they don't drown – they're holograms, remember?), where sharks and jellyfish swim.



Battling on, the pair eventually confront a large mutant octopus cum squid cum crab, before exploring an underwater cavern and eventually making it onto the planet's surface where fires rage and huge insects roam. Beyond lies a hi-tech city and ultimately a confrontation with The Masters!

HAMMERFIST

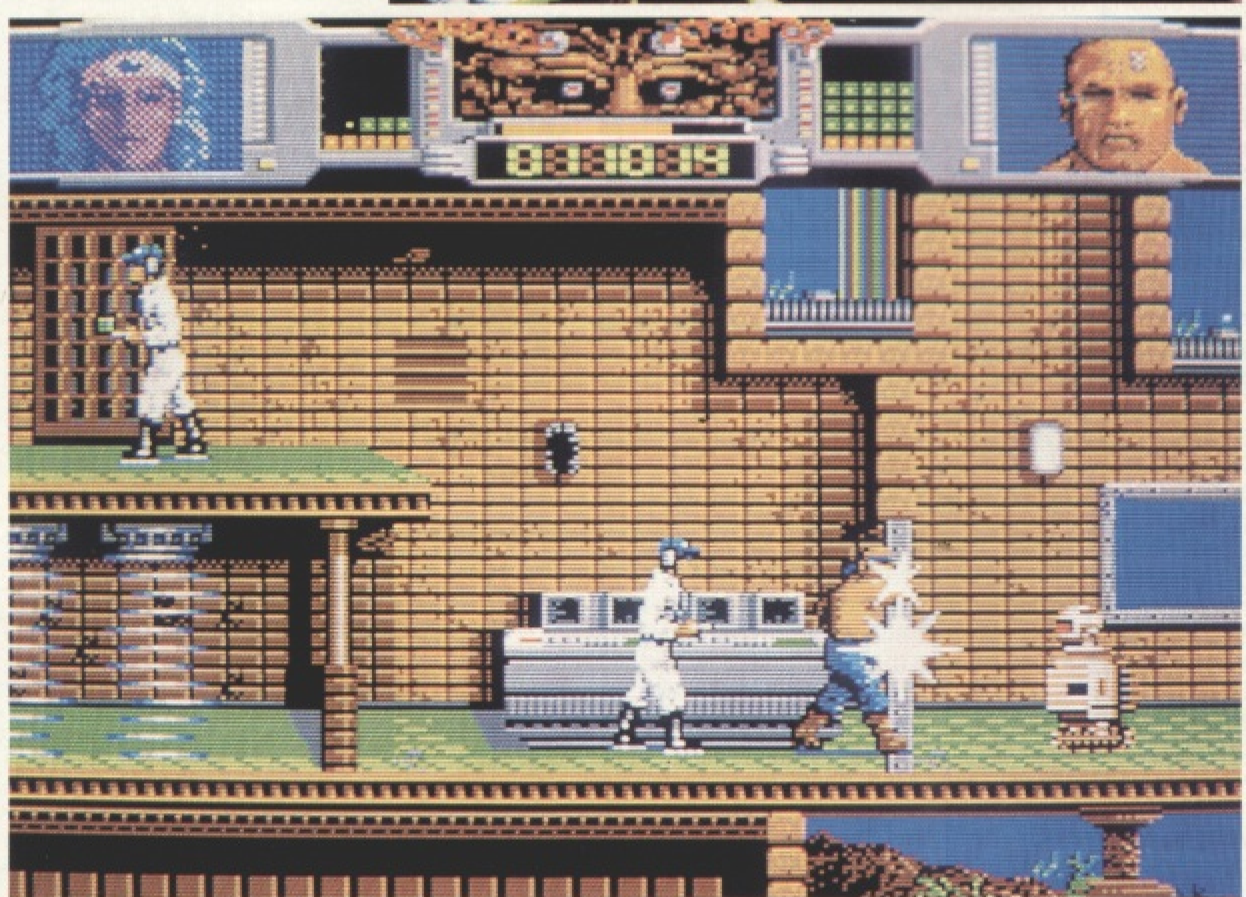
So-called because he has a semi-mechanical arm as the result of a prior conflict. This special appendage is capable of receiving several different attachments, but only two are utilised here: the pneumatic fist, which vibrates at great speed and is used not only for rapid destruction of barriers but opponents. And a laser attachment, which (understandably) allows him to fire lasers, which are even more useful than is first apparent as the beams bounce off the background. Both functions are limited as they require energy, the levels of which are shown at the top right and left of the screen and need constant fueling. Hammerfist's biggest flaw however, is the fact that he's slow, heavy and not very athletic.

METALISIS

This lightweight lady isn't as hard as her balding buddy, but she packs a mean kick and has a cunning stunt up her sleeve: a gymnastic flick-flack, which is used to get around from ledge to ledge or to inflict damage on opponents.

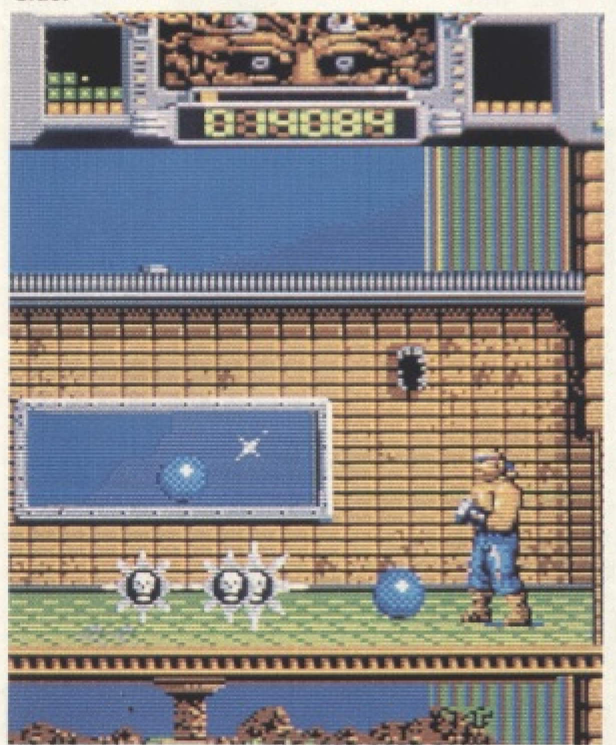
The two characters have their own strengths and weaknesses, the exploitation of which forms the core of the gameplay. The correct choice of character isn't always essential to progress, but in many instances one is more effective than the other. And when it comes to getting up the screen, Metalisis is the only one atheltic enough. Both characters can turn #into' screen and headbutt the scenery though.

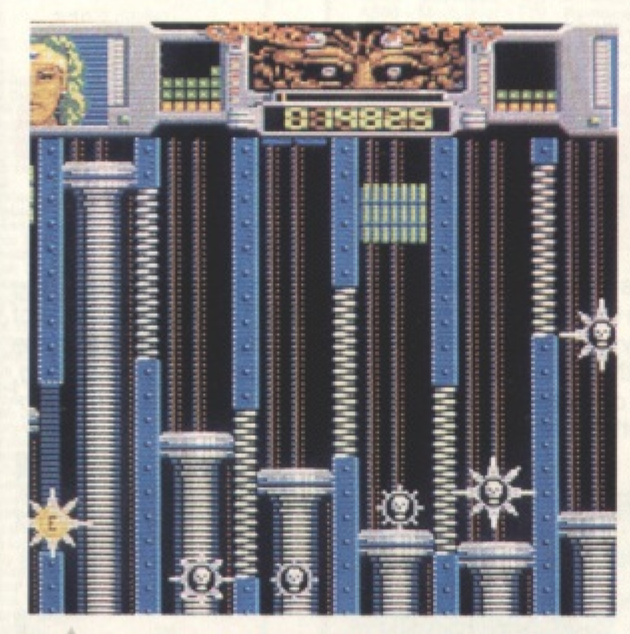




The control centre's security system ensures that there's a constant stream of security droids to contend with – it also means that all the doors are locked. The only solution is to smash everything up – adversaries and scenery alike. Causing sufficient damage to the surroundings deactivates the security system in that room or area and allows any relevant doors to be opened. That said, there are some doors that are only opened with some good old–fashioned brute force.

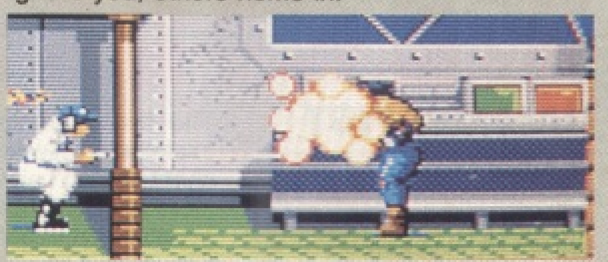
This screen is one of Hammerfist's more straightforward 'puzzles'. The pistons are weight-driven, and of course the two characters have greatly different masses. Thus, when heavy Hammerfist steps onto a piston, it falls. Transforming into Metalisis, the piston rises. Because there's no piston to support the crates, they occasionally fall from above. The idea is to use the two characters' weights to manoeuvre them into position and break open the doors and get to the other side.





On its demise, an adversary releases a specific type of energy – such as a top-up for both forms, or recharges for Hammerfist's piston fist or laser. Bodily contact destroys your adversary and results in the release of a mystery token, which is collected by punching it. Some token types are not present in some rooms, which adds another dimension to the strategy aspect as you must retrace your steps when the going gets rough. Released energy remains only temporarily – fail to collect it in time and The Masters' energy increases to the point where they become active. Any further icons released thereafter are deadly and drain the team's energy (fortunately, not collecting the bad icons means that the badness goes back to The Masters and the situation returns to normal).

The adversaries vary not only in size and shape, but also in the way that they behave. Security droids aplenty patrol the underwater complex, some floating, others trundling along the floor. Some ignore you, others home in.



The Technicians are the most intelligent opponents you encounter. Not only do these human-like workers shoot back, they punch and kick and even duck and jump to avoid Hammerfist's fire!

THE VID KIDZ

In September 1988, Vivid Image Design was born of three industry veterans: John Twiddy, Mev Dinc and Hugh Riley. "We'd been programming for other people for so long, we decided to do it for ourselves," John Twiddy reveals.

John Twiddy made his debut with Pesky Painter (an Armidar clone) for Supersoft (ask your father), and an assortment of spreadsheets and databases. This wasn't as dull as it sounds, as it taught John plenty of programming disciplines – disciplines that were applied when converting Tau Ceti (for CRL) and Ikari Warriors (for Elite) to the C64, and programming and adding to the gameplay of System 3's The Last Ninja and its sequel Ninja II. John has also been responsible for writing Expert cartridge software.

Mev Dinc's games programming career began after he impressed one of the captains of the software industry with his sprite editor – although he didn't actually take Mev on, this major figure did recommend him to one of his big cheese chums. Mev's opening volley was Firebird's Gerry The Germ (a collection of sub-games concerning parts of the body!), followed by the isometric-perspective antics of Electric Dream's Prodigy (which saw the player looking after a baby in a troublesome future world!). Two licensed wares came next: Activision's Knightmare (based on the television series of the same name) and Big Trouble In Little China. Mev's last project before VID was System 3's Ninja II (which also involved input into gameplay design).

Hugh Riley is VID's main artist. A former fire-blower and juggler (who specialised with flaming tennis balls would you believe!), Hugh's family has a circus-style entertainment background. However, life under the big top wasn't for him, and with a degree in animation under his belt, he decided to get into computer art and so logged onto Compunet, where he entered and won all of the art competitions. Hugh has since produced the visuals for nearly all of System 3's wares, such as The Last Ninja, Predator, Bangkok Knights, Ninja II and some of Tusker.

Hammerfist was actually written on 16-bit by newcomer Andrew Bond. However, it remains very much the work of the VID kids as a whole. With a storyline under their belt, the team drew inspiration from almost every source and came up with ideas they felt that players would like to see. From there on the game just grew and grew, with Hugh drawing on DPaint III and the programmers doing their stuff on PDS systems. But what about a two-player sequel? "The way Hammerfist ends does leave it open to a sequel," says Twiddy. "But that's all I'm saying for now."

VID's next project is The Time Machine, the idea for which came from Hugh's wife, Lisa. VID is developing it with former Gremlin programmer Jason Perkins (Thing On Spring, Thing Bounces Back, Deflektor on the ST, all of the Monty games on the 64 apart from first one, Avenger, and Way Of The Tiger. Oh – and Frak! on the C64 for Statesoft). The idea is that as a professor you go back in time and interact with environment, thus affecting the course of history. It's arguably not the most original of ideas, but the execution is quite unique for home computer. Performing a task in one of the five time zones affects the others. Raffaele Cecco (pronounced Checko) of Cybernoid fame, and his partner Nick Jones are also involved in the development of The Time Machine, providing gameplay input and converting to 8-bit.

A First impressions are of a straightforward shoot 'em up of sorts, but there's more to Hammerfist than meets the eye. The playability seems just right, as the game's easy enough to get into, giving you time to get used to the controls (and you need to, especially when you end up in at the deep end). No expense has been spared in the colour department, with plenty of variety in the backdrops and characters. The animation's top-notch too, and not just where functional movements are concerned – many quality touches are present throughout, such as the characters crouching when they land, the aliens recoiling when hit, sparks flying from Hammer's fist when it makes contact with anything (even the scenery), and the screen flashing depending on quantity of explosions. Soundwise, everything's equally as impressive. A thumping good title track pumps the adrenalin, and there's a choice between meaningful spot FX for most events and reasonable in-game music. But of course none of this would amount to a hill of beans if the gameplay wasn't up to scratch – and it is. VID carefully treads the thin line between frustration and tedium, and the result is a satisfying mix of dextral and mental exercise, with the emphasis on the action. A slick debut which bodes well for future VID releases.

PRICE	£24.99
RELEASED	Out Now
GRAPHICS	85%
SOUND	85%
PLAYABILITY	88%
VALUE	78%
OVERALL	**86%**



With the Amiga incarnation under his belt, programmer Andrew Bond has dived into producing the translation. There should be no discernible difference between the two.



The conversion of Hammerfist to MS-DOS compatibles depends on the success of the other two versions. However, if it does eventually happen, it won't be courtesy of VID.





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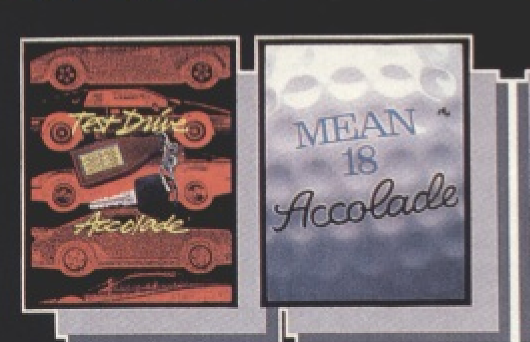


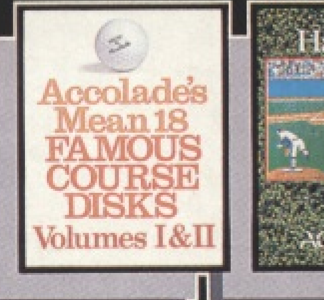
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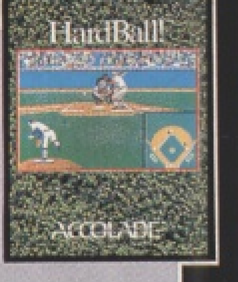
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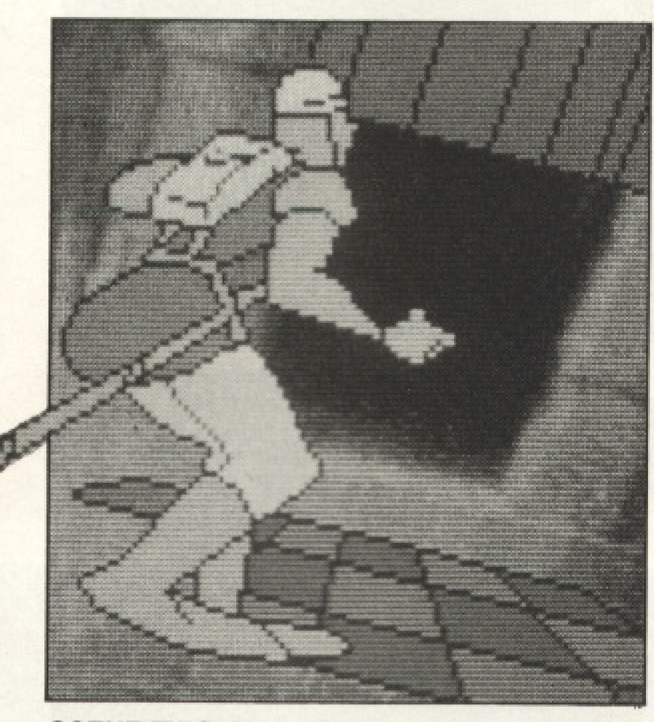
ESCAPE FROM SINGE'S CASTLE

(Empire/Readysoft)

Dirk the Daring diddled, courtesy of Richard Harper of Merseyside.

SCENE ONE: THE TILT ROOM

When the room begins to shake, pull DOWN. When Dirk lands, push UP when the tiles fall away, and then UP again. When Dirk leaps clear, push LEFT or RIGHT towards the door.



SCENE TWO: THE HORSE

Push LEFT or RIGHT away from the wall of flame as soon as it appears. There are two more to come – the next on the opposite side of the screen to the first, and the last on the same side as the first. When the horse pitches forward, move in the direction Dirk is facing to jump clear of the horse.

SCENE THREE: THE CRUMBLING WALK-WAY

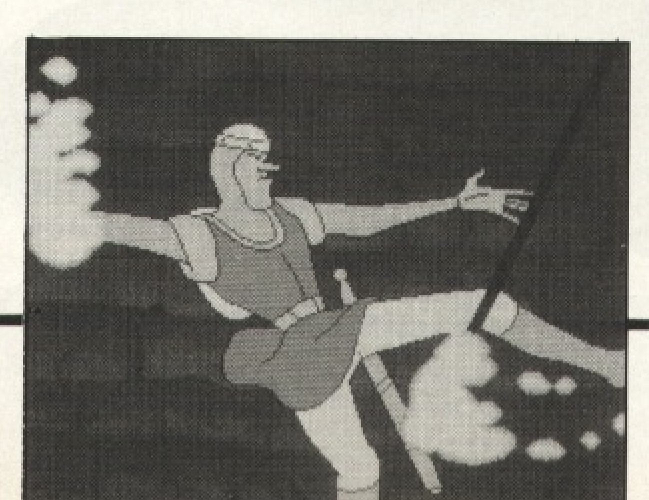
Push UP as soon as Dirk puts both his feet onto the walkway. After he has landed, push UP again. Repeat this for all four scenes.

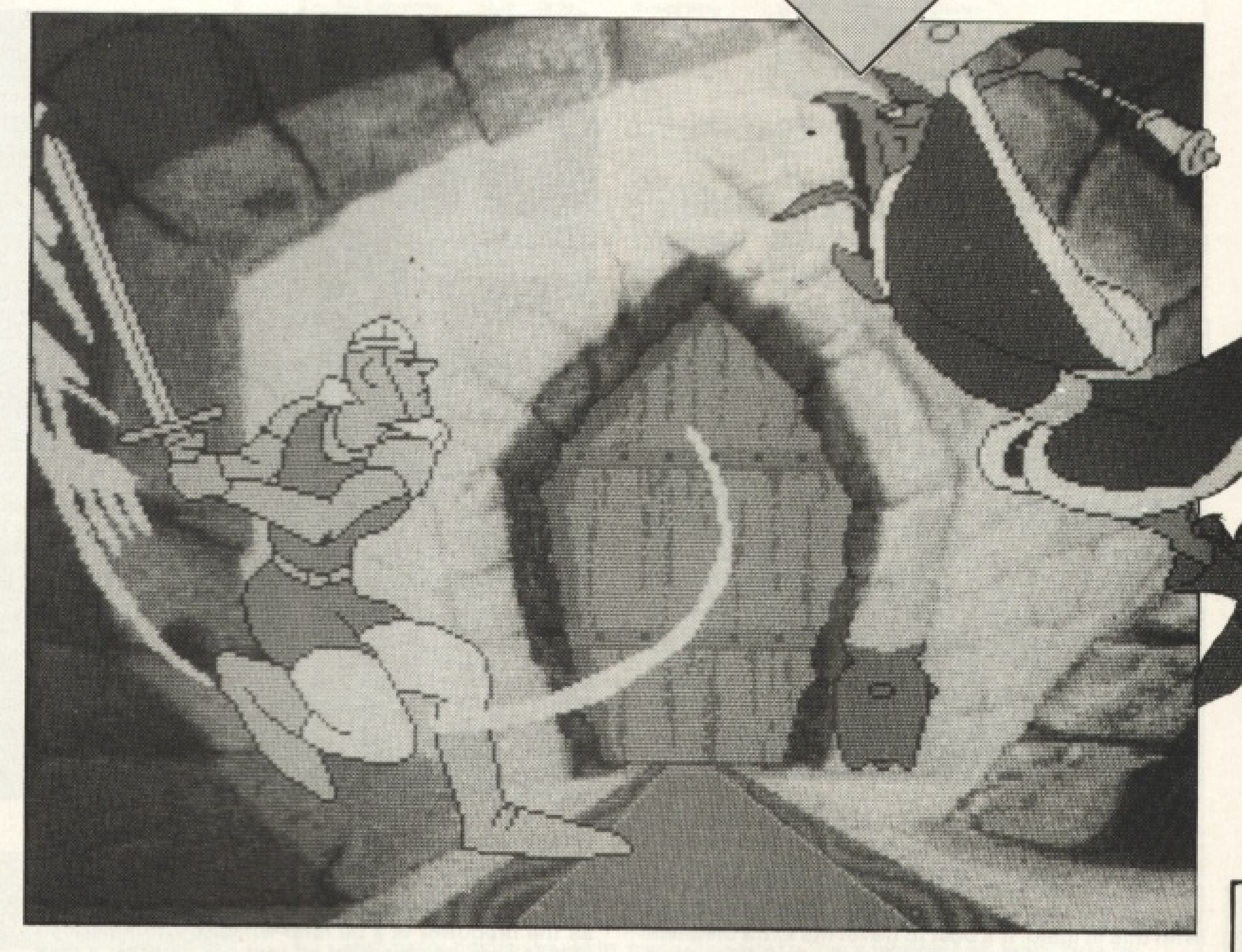
SCENE FOUR: THE SMITHEE

When the sword begins to glow, press FIRE. Then when the sword flies towards Dirk, press FIRE again to knock it away. To avoid the anvil attack, move Dirk towards the side of the screen that he is nearest to.

SCENE FIVE: THE BURNING ROPES

Push LEFT or RIGHT towards the ropes when Dirk mutters "Uh, oh!" When he is swinging, push UP, and then push LEFT or RIGHT towards the next rope every time he reaches out for the next rope.



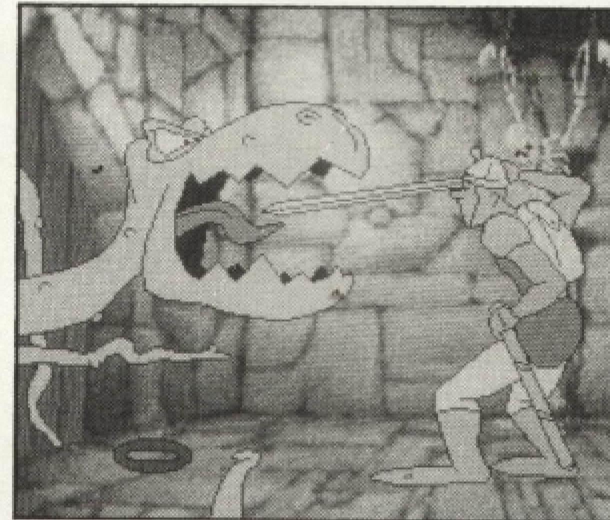


SCENE SIX: THE LIZARD KING

Move towards Dirk's sword as soon as it is drawn away, and then move in the same direction again when the Lizard King advances. When the screen changes, push UP and then UP again as the sword moves towards the T-junction. When the scene changes again, press FIRE to grab the sword, and FIRE again as the Lizard King appears. Then move twice in the direction of the Lizard King. When Dirk's sword becomes trapped, pull DOWN then press FIRE when he rolls out of the way.

SCENE SEVEN: THE DOOR

When the knocker starts to glow, push away from it. When Dirk lands, press FIRE, and then hit FIRE again once he has drawn his sword.



SCENE EIGHT: THE GOONS

As soon as Dirk appears from the trap door, push RIGHT or LEFT towards the stairs. Then when a Goon appears, press FIRE and go RIGHT or LEFT towards the stairs as soon as the creature's dead. Push UP when Dirk begins to climb the stairs, and go LEFT or RIGHT to the exit as soon as he reaches the top.

SCENE NINE: THE MUD MONSTERS

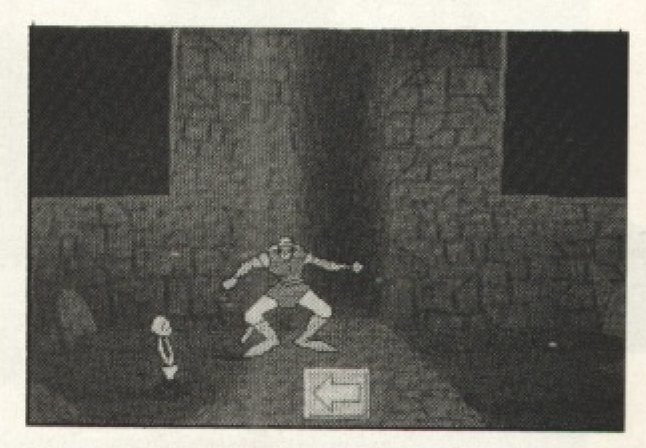
When Dirk walks forward, pull DOWN. When the scene changes, push UP and then push away from the river. Push UP when the scene changes again, and then push in the direction of the bridge to cross it. When you get to the end, pull DOWN. Finally push in the direction of the cave entrance.

SCENE TEN: THE LABYRINTH

Run around the maze until Dirk enters the large chamber. When he pauses, push RIGHT or LEFT away from the hand, and then jump UP. When Dirk lands, move LEFT or RIGHT and then go RIGHT or LEFT to exit through the door.

SCENE ELEVEN: THE SHAPESHIFTER'S CRYPT

As soon as the Shapeshifter appears, move LEFT or RIGHT away from the crook of the staff. When the lightning strikes, push RIGHT or LEFT towards it. When the screen flips, move RIGHT or LEFT again and then UP. As soon as Dirk lands on the stairs, move LEFT or RIGHT towards the hole and then quickly go UP. Once Dirk is at the top of the stairs, pull DOWN and then push UP towards the Shapeshifter. As Dirk runs towards the Shapeshifter, press FIRE, and then press FIRE again when he swings his sword. Daphne is now yours once again!



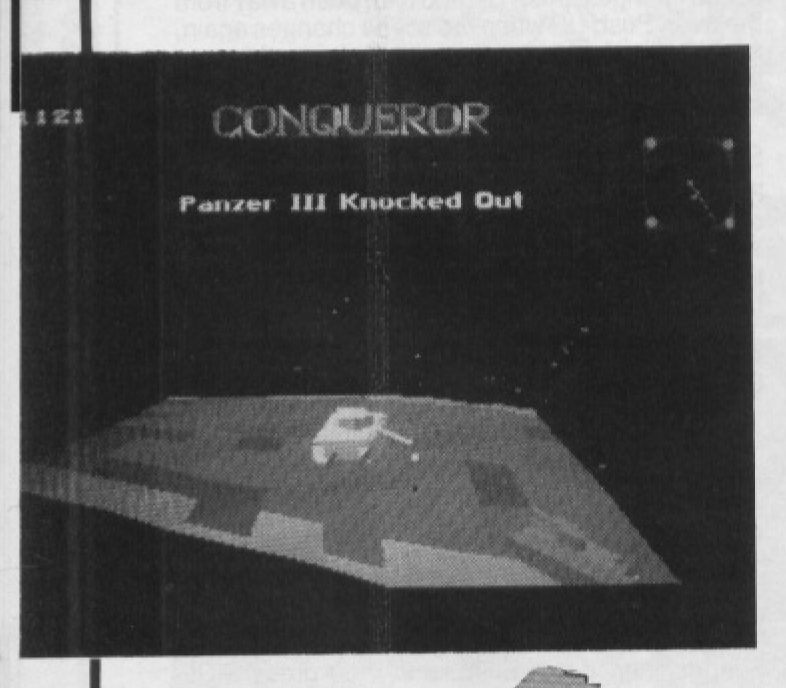
CONQUEROR

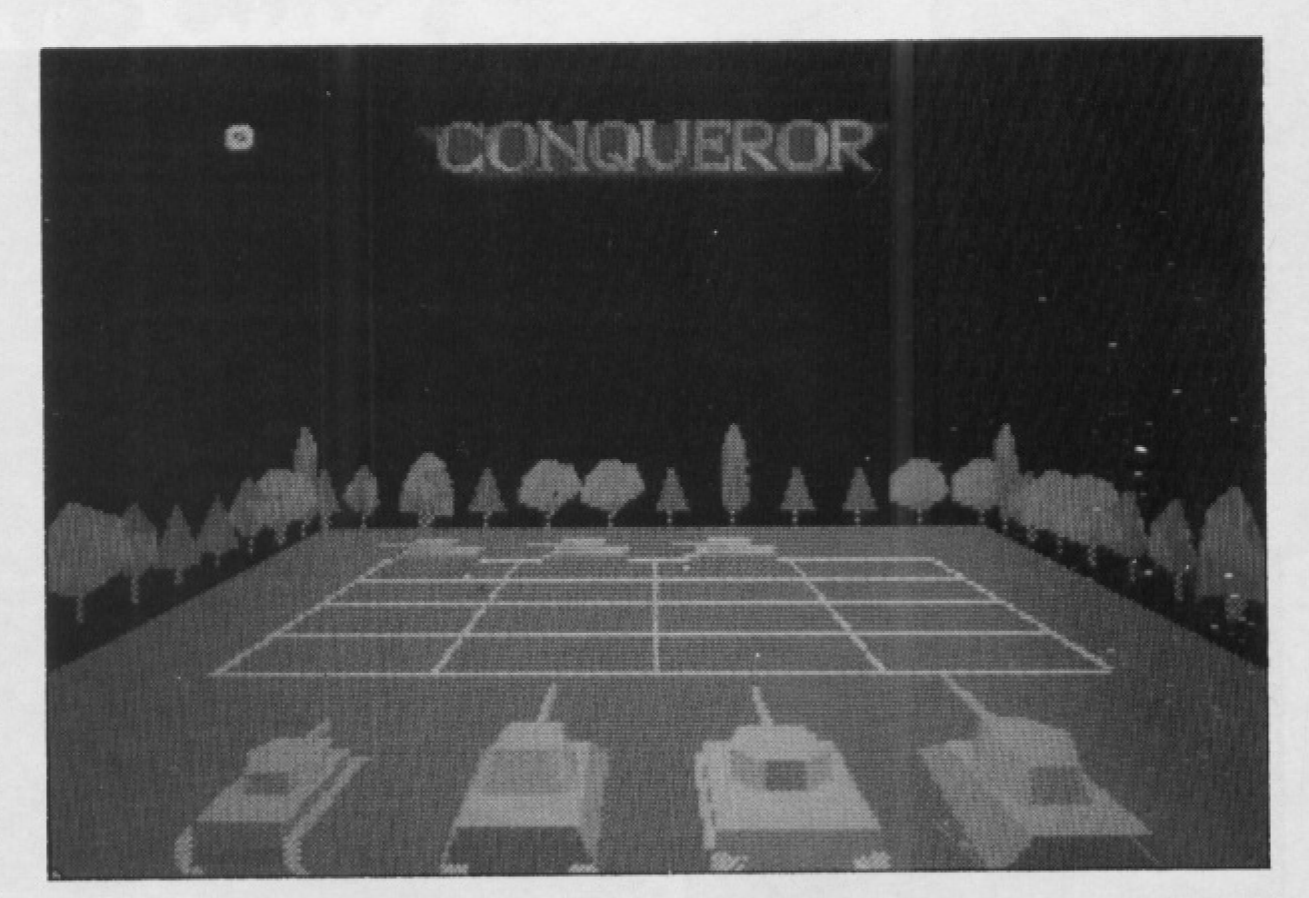
(Rainbow Arts)

Game designer Jonathan Griffiths keeps on rolling with this handy selection of beginner's tips . . .



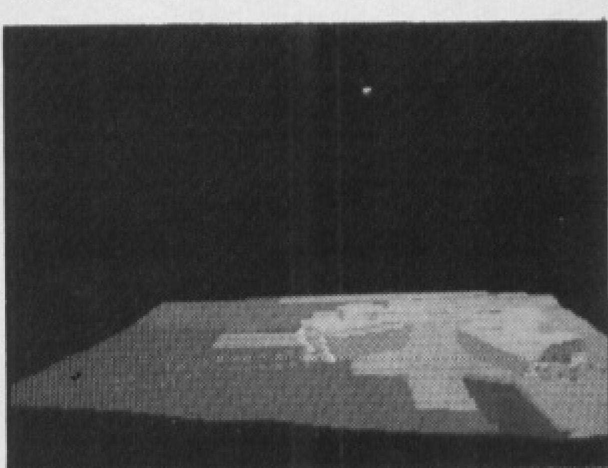
▲Here's a clever little thing that most people don't notice. If you open fire on an enemy tank from a diagonal, you'll cause less damage to that tank, as the bullets you fire have to travel further ie diagonally through the tank's armour, so they have less effect. With this in mind, it's best to travel the extra distance so you can open fire on the side of a tank from dead ahead – unless of course you're equipped with a heavy gun, in which case you can knock it out no mater what way you're facing!





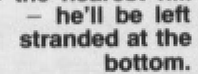
▲When choosing a tank, choose one that best suits your style of play – obviously a few test drives are in order. You'll find that the light tanks are fast, but they're generally less useful than the heavier models as the firepower is a bit limp-wristed. The American M36 is probably the best all-rounder, offering a nice balance of speed and hard-hitting firepower.

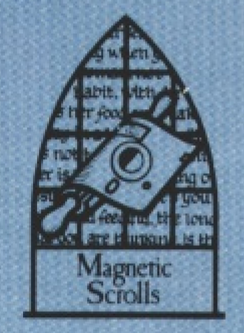
▲Strategy-wise, it's best to organise your tanks so that they patrol in groups rather than individually. When you've got one more than tank in combat, you can encircle the enemy and thus divert him with one tank (an enemy tank can only follow one tank at a time) and knock him out with the rest. And since the computer tanks tend to move about in groups themselves, individual patrols are not really a good idea.



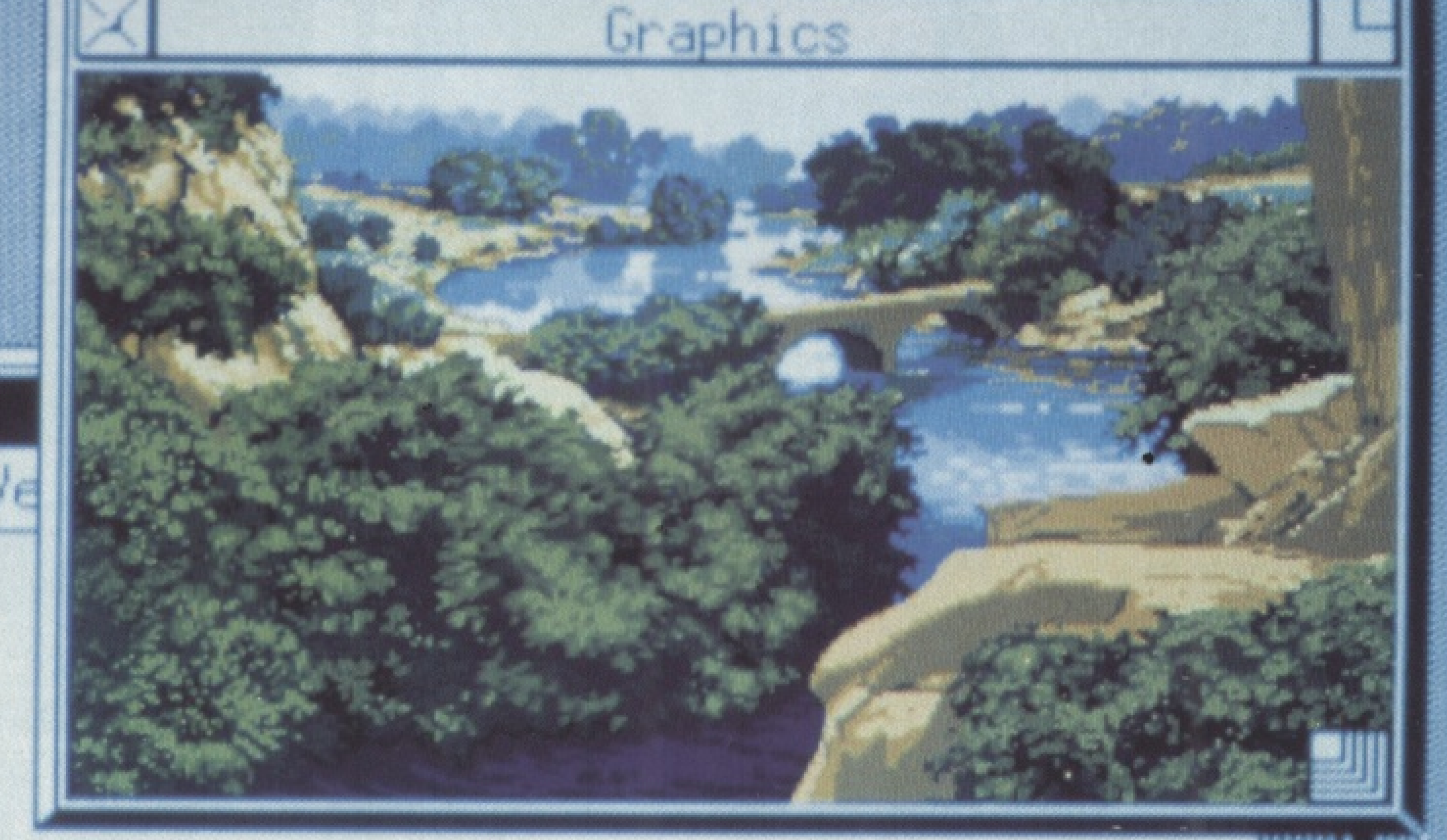
▲As a beginner, it's best to select a fixed gun turret, which has two advantages. For a start it means you don't have to worry about controlling both the movements of the tank and the turret separately AND it has the added bonus of forcing you to face the enemy while in combat. The armour at the front of your tank is the thickest, so you've got the best protection against fire if you're facing the enemy.

▲Try to stick to the roads as much as possible, as all the tanks perform better on them – but when you inevitably have to go onto the fields and the countryside, try to steer clear of steep inclines and especially rivers. You'll find that the German tanks in particular are useless at travelling up hills (just like the real tanks they were based on) and you can use this to your advantage. If you're in a German tank, try to attack while moving down a hill, as this is when you'll be at top speed. But if a German tank is pursuing you, make your way up the nearest hill – he'll be left stranded at the bottom.

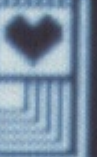




Magnetic Scrolls



Graphics
Game Ve
>Curiouser and curiouser...



Infestation

Psygnosis' latest is overrun with eight-legged nasties that threaten to do a little more damage than frightening your sister. Gordon Houghton leads the bug hunt.



Mankind's colonisation of the stars had been a long and dangerous undertaking. It resulted in off-world bases being established on hundreds of planets and moons, but the process was never easy.

Then, man's worst fears were realised when transmissions to the observation colony Alpha II gave the first indications of an alien invasion. The computer systems went haywire, but before cutting off completely one of the last messages intimated the discovery of strange eggs.

Assembling a strike fleet would take too long, so the Interplanetary Federation was called in. Only one agent was stationed close enough to the action – the combat veteran, Kal Solar. His mission: infiltrate the base and eliminate the infestation.

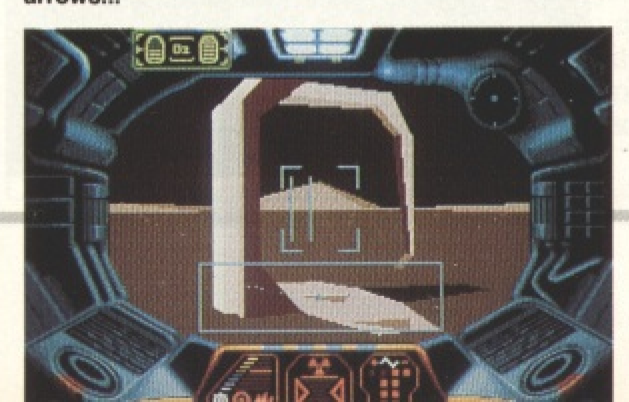
A brief animated introduction launches Kal onto the moon's surface. Xelos is a forbidding place: a 15-minute day leads quickly into a frozen night. There's only one indigenous surface life form – the vicious moon marauder with its tough, chitinous exoskeleton – but plenty of other defenders rush to form a welcoming committee.

Your first visions of the planet surface aren't comforting. Only your space-suit and helmet protect you from the deadly surface atmosphere, and your Manned Manoeuvring Unit (MMU) helps avoid the alien attackers. But what do you do now? Vaguely remembering something about terminals and transporters, you set off to look.

Terminals form an intelligence network around the base. Some contain maps, some (like this at surface co-ordinates 90,30) allow you to activate other objects and access information. Enter here and type in your name (Kal Solar) to discover that a transporter's been activated. It's time to go and find it...

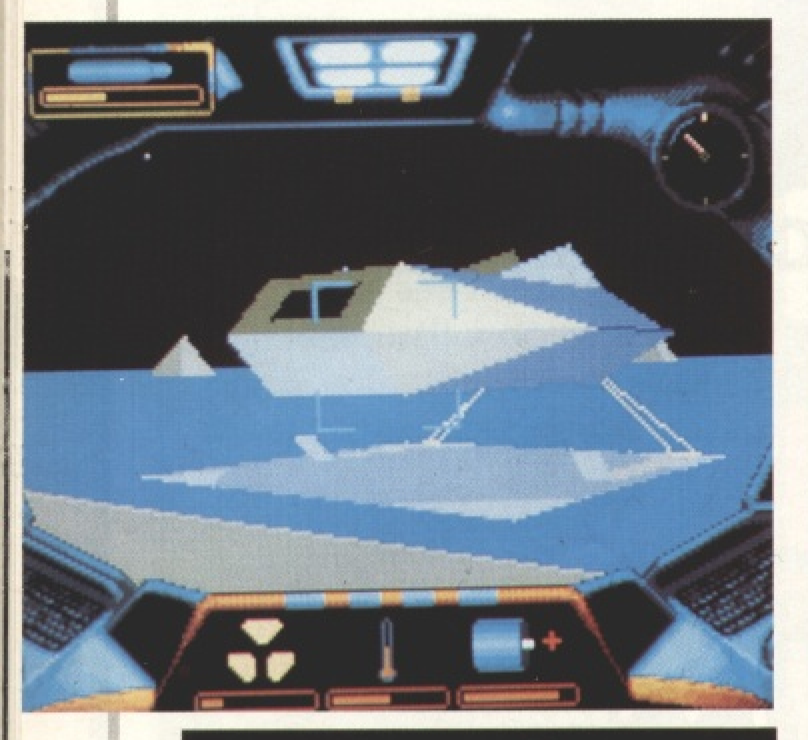


Eventually, heart pounding, with energy and oxygen running low, you find the transporter at 50,50. The MMU ran out of fuel long ago, so you had to leg it here with bugs on your trail. Transporters, shuttles and lifts are the quickest ways of getting around, but you never quite know where they take you. This time you have no choice: logically, you walk in the direction of the arrows...





And find yourself, at last, inside. Time to check the HUD displays: life support low, co-ordinates 50,23, nothing in the inventory. Atmosphere analysis reveals the air components: 75 per cent nitrogen, 25 per cent oxygen. Breathable. Cautiously, you lift the helmet, power down the suit and begin exploring.



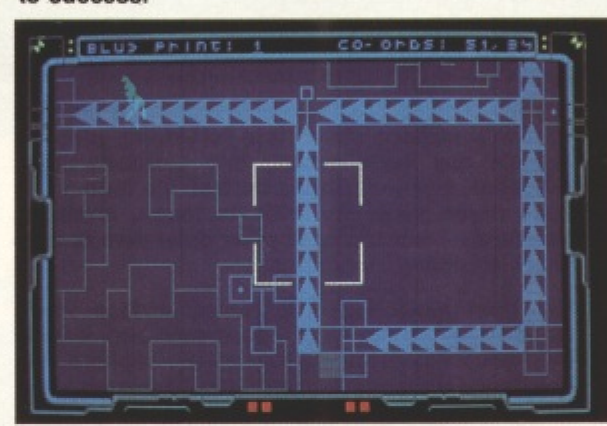


There are only a few varieties of enemy on Xelos, but their ferocity compensates for their scarcity. Though rare, these Guardians are undoubtedly the worst: you have a few moments as they turn to face you and shoot deadly photons from their eyes.

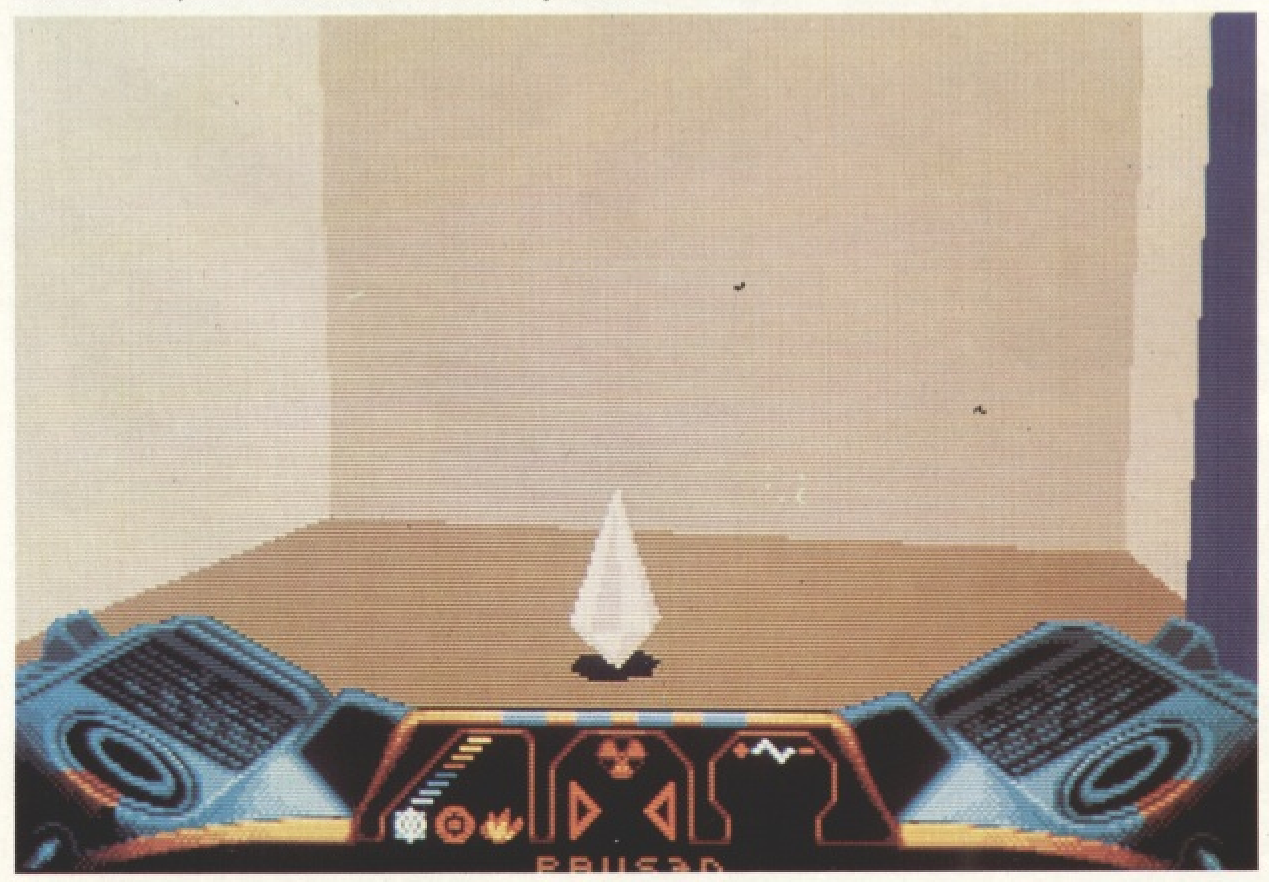


Part of the attract sequence is this data bank of all the game objects. It can also be accessed during the action by quitting to the menu screen, interrogating the object file and resuming play.

Accessing terminals within the main complex allows you to view a map of the base. Figure out how to interpret this alien scribble and you may be on the way to success.



These unhatched ellipsoids lie behind the insectile insurgence. Unfortunately, all the eggs aren't in one basket, and this is just the first of 167 that need to be sought and destroyed. If you gather a bundle of cyanide canisters, crack one open here to destroy the embryo invertebrate before it has time to indulge in some arthropod argy-bargy. But remember, even Kal Solar can choke on cyanide...

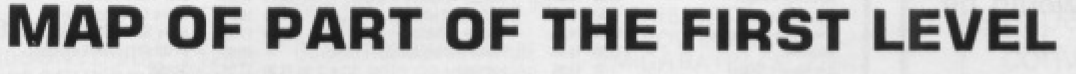




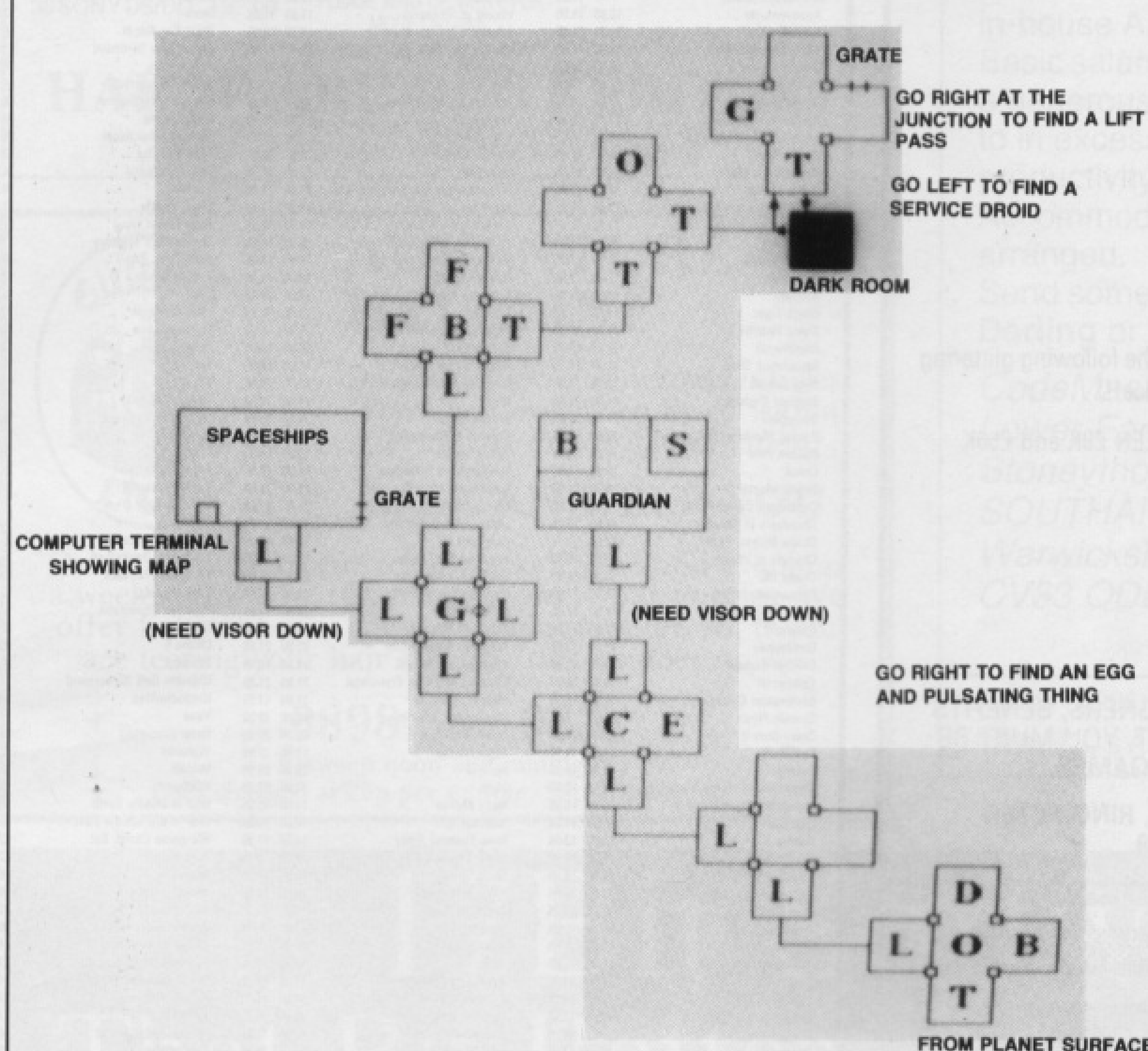
Kal can crawl, and he doesn't suffer from claustrophobia – two qualities which make him ideal material for investigating the labyrinthine ventilation systems. Anyone who doesn't like confined spaces will just have to grin and bear it: the worst thing you can come across is a Welding Droid, and you might make an uplifting discovery that will provide the key to some problems.

There are many ways of dying, all of which are painful. The most grisly involves removing your helmet on the planet surface: the unequal pressures between the inside and outside of your head result in cranial popcorn. If this is too much, you can always die of poisoning, lack of oxygen and food, or even freeze to death. To help you get over those morbid thoughts, the program includes a Save Game feature.

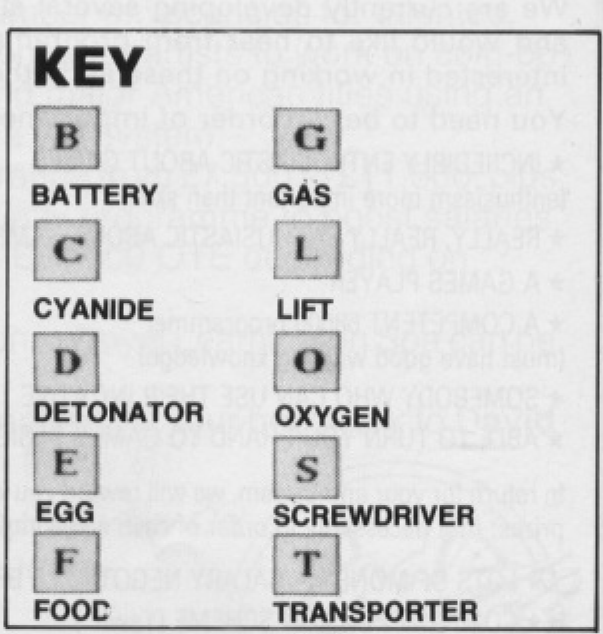




MAP OF PART OF THE FIRST LEVEL



TO GET TO THE UNDERGROUND COMPLEX, GO TO THE TERMINAL AT 90,30 ON THE PLANET'S SURFACE. ACCESS THE TERMINAL AND TYPE IN 'KAL SOLAR'. NOW GO TO THE TRANSPORTER AT 50,50 (USE THE MMU) AND ENTER IT, FOLLOWING THE DIRECTION OF THE ARROWS.



DAN DAN THE INFESTATION MAN

Both available versions of Infestation are the work of Dan Gallagher, who started his programming life with the 8-bit **Star Wars** for Vektor Grafix. Having next dabbled in a snatch of budget software for Superior, he went on to write his first 16-bit game, Ocean's **Voyager**. Since then his time has been entirely devoted to Psygnosis and Infestation. Dan's interests include fast cars and musical instruments – the piano, keyboards and trumpet amongst them – the game's music and sound effects, however, were written by Sean Conran. Infestation utilises an advanced version of the 3D polygon generation system used in Voyager – as Dan observes: "It's a progression: as you develop, you find better ways of creating environments." His current project is a road racing game for Psygnosis, for which neither final details nor even a name have been decided as yet. It's not surprising that some of his favourite coin-ops include **Chase HQ** and **OutRun**. However, one game he'd ideally like to program is a space epic: "Bringing **Elite** into the 90s." Since the action is a tad tough at first, we asked for Dan's tips. "Basically, whenever you see items such as food or oxygen, don't just grab them instinctively – always check your levels on the life support HUD first, and make notes about the relevant co-ordinates on the HUD scratch pad. When killing eggs, you don't even need to see them: if you release cyanide at the right point, you can destroy a lot of the pods with just one canister. Finally, when you're doing a lot of moving around, particularly in the air vents, it's best to lift up the helmet and save the oxygen supply, and to turn off the suit power unit to conserve the battery. But don't leave it off too long or you could freeze to death, particularly on the planet surface."

A

Infestation is tough to get into, especially as the instructions give little away – but it's well worth perseverance. The plot reworks the **Alien** theme (with insect eggs using humans as incubators) which is a simple enough idea, but executed to great effect. Part of the enjoyment comes from the visual display: the smooth 3D (but not quite silky – more like 100 per cent cotton), the option to fly, walk or crawl, and the well presented HUDs providing vital status information. There's also a view with the helmet off: the slowing of movement is more than compensated for by the increase in screen size. Better still are the sound effects – a hollow, metallic breathing which quickens as you burn energy and slows when you rest. Coupled with the appropriately minimal spot effects, this generates a superbly tense atmosphere. There are only a couple of minor annoyances: it's quite easy to die at the start (the Save Game option helps), some object shapes are a bit too abstract, and some of the exploration does become repetitive – but not for a very long time.

PRICE	£24.95
RELEASE DATE	Out Now
GRAPHICS	88%
SOUND	90%
PLAYABILITY	79%
VALUE	76%
OVERALL	**85%**



Atari-based bug-bashing contains all the same features bar one: the sound data takes up a mere 70K compared to the Amiga's 100K. It's also available now for £24.95.



There are no immediate plans to convert: in fact, it's only 50/50 as to whether or not PC owners will get the chance to destroy those dipterous dastards.

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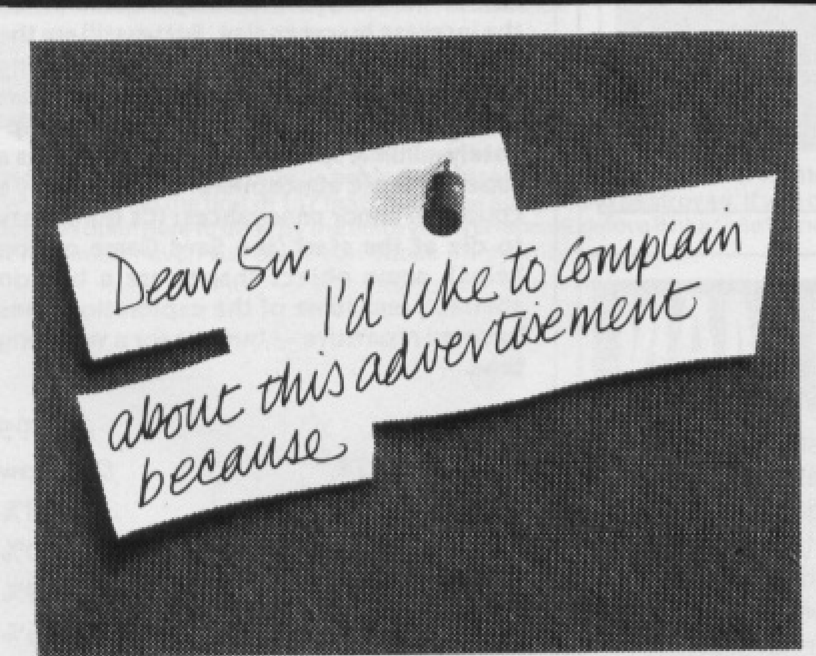
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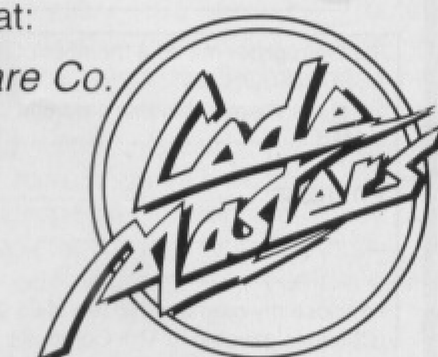
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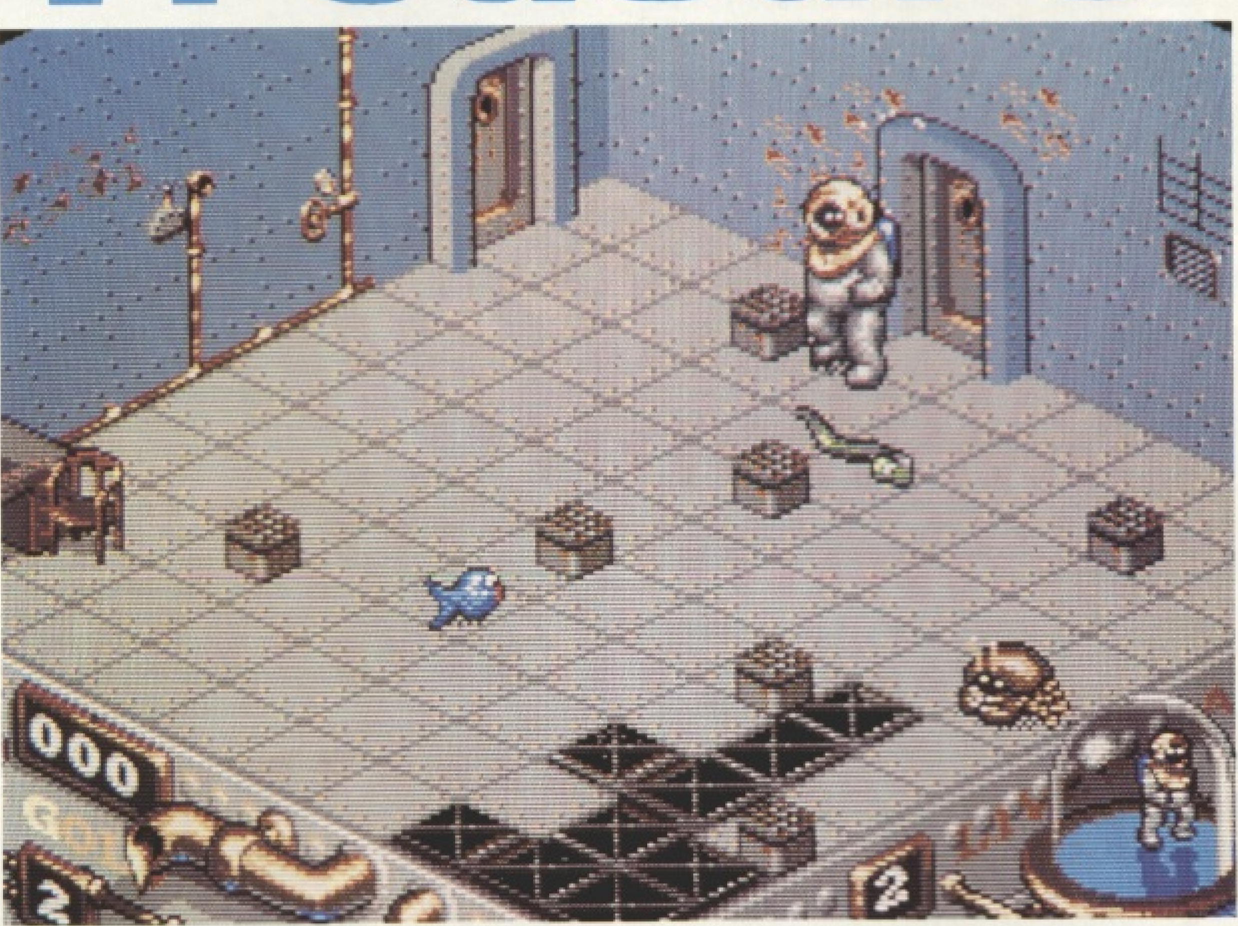
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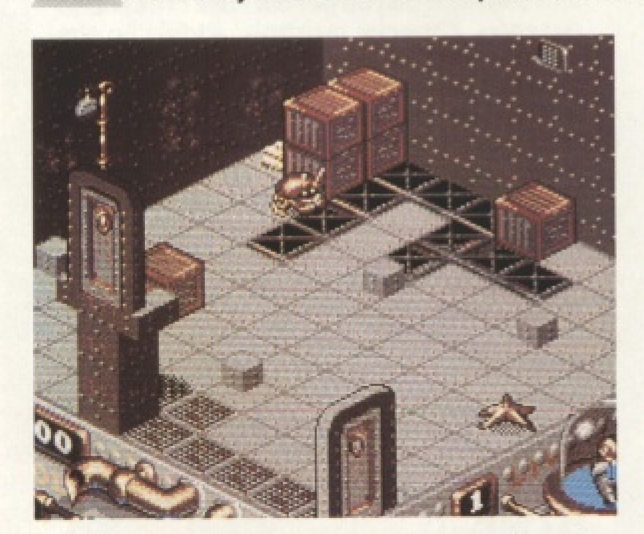




Treasure Trap

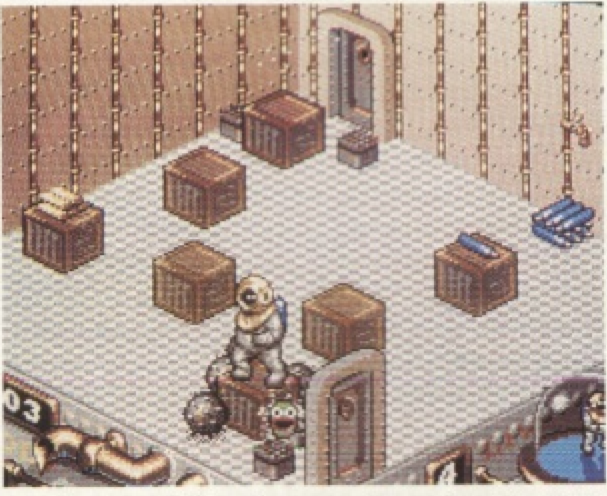


The sunken wreck comprises over 100 rooms. The idea is simply to explore them, collect all the lost gold and then escape to the surface. Sounds easy, but then you didn't reckon on the unpleasant undersea wildlife... hammerhead sharks, jellyfish, electric eels, octopi, starfish and schools of piranha roam the water-filled decks and cabins. Fortunately most of them have predictable movement patterns and aren't too difficult to avoid.



Nothing is more precious to a deep-sea diver than air. Fortunately this mission has been carefully planned and the SS Poon's Dive Master has arranged for extra oxygen cylinders to be placed in key locations around the Esmerelda. Collecting one of these restores your supply to maximum, but you have to choose your pick-up carefully. Collect one while you have more than half a tank of air remaining and your diving suit becomes over-inflated, leaving you floating uncontrollably around the cabin until your air drops back to a normal level.

Most of the furniture and objects are moveable: by walking into chairs, tables, packing crates and the like, it's possible to shunt them around the cabins and place them in more useful positions where you can use them to gain extra height for a jump or to block a hostile creature's path. Care must be taken when moving things around though. Because you can only push an object, it can become trapped in corners or other awkward places where you can't get to it. Fortunately all objects are restored to their original places either when you die or leave and re-enter a room.



With space tight and a gang of aqua-fiends to deal with, it can be nigh-on impossible to get through some rooms. This is where your secret weapon comes in handy – you're equipped with friendly Smart Fish which, when let out of their jar, destroy every hostile creature in the room. But use your fish sparingly as they are in very short supply.



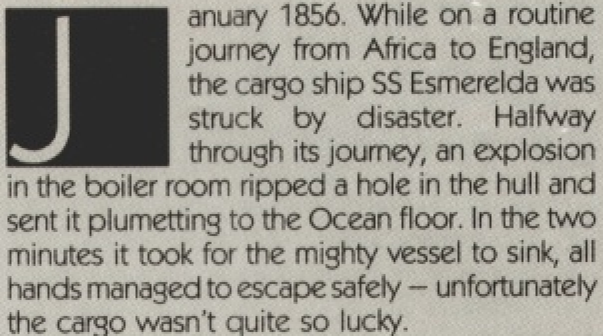
Gary Whitta gets tanked up and dips his toes in Electronic Zoo's latest. Don't hold your breath...

January 1856. While on a routine journey from Africa to England, the cargo ship SS Esmerelda was struck by disaster. Halfway through its journey, an explosion in the boiler room ripped a hole in the hull and sent it plumetting to the Ocean floor. In the two minutes it took for the mighty vessel to sink, all hands managed to escape safely – unfortunately the cargo wasn't quite so lucky.

Over 20 million dollars of gold bullion, which was being transported back to London by the Esmerelda to help shore up the flagging economy, went down with the ship. And it's still there 71 years later, in 1927, 300 feet below the surface on the Ocean floor, further down than any diver has ever been able to reach.

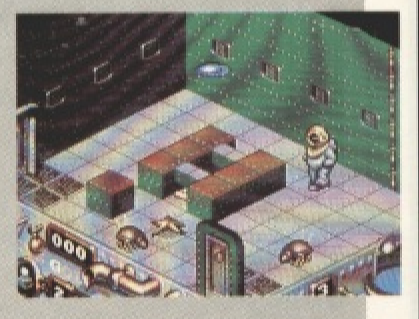
Until now.

Enter Howard Kelp, deep-sea explorer and underwater salvage operative extraordinaire. After spending 14 years searching for the Esmerelda, Howard has at last located the wreck and has initiated an elaborate mission to recover the lost fortune. Taking the salvage vessel SS Poon out into the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Kelp starts off on the underwater mission of a lifetime...





Some gold's easy enough to find. But when the Gold Detector flashes and there's nothing valuable in sight, it's time to improvise. Unleashing a Smart Fish to remove the cohabitants of this room is not the answer – the gold's hidden under that pile of blocks in the centre, and you're far too fat to crawl underneath...



Lateral thinking's the (side) order of the day. Careful positioning of the moveable block forces the sub-sea subjects to scuttle around it. And in the starfish's case, beneath the pile of blocks...



Et voila! The five-legged fiend temporarily becomes your friend as it pushes the gold bars from beneath the obstruction. Go get 'em, Floyd!

WIN!

IT'S OF-FISH-AL!
IT'S A BREAM COME TRUE!
IT'S RUDD-Y FIN-TASTIC!
IT'S WHELK COOL!
IT'S THE OP-PERCH-TUNA-TY OF A LIFETIME!

Yes you are herring us correctly! What with Electronic Zoo's latest effort Treasure Trap featuring more underwater lifeforms than The Observers Guide To Fishies, and taking into account the probable lifestyle of our average reader, we believe we've come up with the perch–fect competition prize. If you thought you'd haddock classy feast or two in your time, this whale mackerel change!

A YEAR'S SUPPLY OF FISH AND CHIPS FROM THE CHIPPY OF YOUR CHOICE

The boys down at the Zoo aren't shellfish. They're offering a prize that guarantees you'll never want for a slice of greasy pleasure again. The first prize is a slap-up fish supper for two (from the chippy of your choice), EVERY WEEK for a WHOLE YEAR! Electronic Zoo has even promised to throw in some mushy peas as well!

To win this gourmet's nightmare (or one of the 10 copies of Treasure Trap that are on offer to the runners-up), all you have to do is answer these three simple questions, then skate down to your local postbox and send your entry (on a postcard or the back of a sealed envelope) to Fishy Frolics, The One, Priory Court, 30–32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU to arrive no later than Monday the 28th of May 1990. So what are you whale-ting for? Pull your fish fingers out.

1) In your local chippy, what is generally the most expensive of these three types of fish?
A Cod
B Plaice
C Scampi

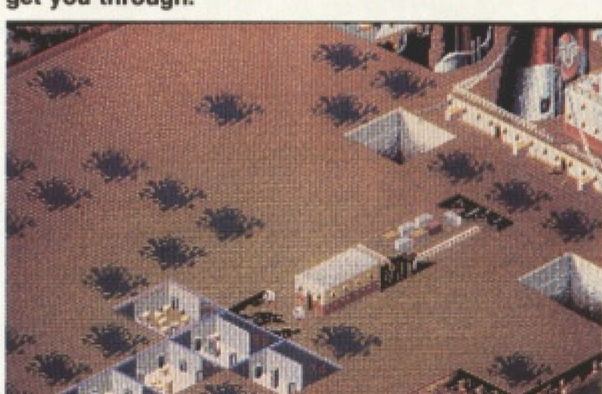
2) What is the most dangerous of these three fish?
A Goldfish
B Salmon
C Great White Shark

3) What was Electronic Zoo's first release?
A Presumed Guilty
B Battle Squadron
C Treasure Trap

THE SMALL PRINT

The editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. If any employee of either EMAP, Electronic Zoo or Billingsgate Fish Market tries to enter, the boys will be around to their plaice and give them a severe battering.

Moving from cabin to cabin is usually a simple matter of walking through the pressure doors. That is, of course, unless the door in question is locked. The keys that open them are found scattered around the ship – although they don't actually look anything like keys. They come in the form of 3D shapes that correspond to the symbols found above locked doors – only a key that matches the door's symbol will get you through.



A map is on hand to make exploration a little easier. But don't think it helps you hunt down all the gold straight away, as only rooms already discovered are displayed – the map becomes more comprehensive as you progress.

DOODLE BUGGED

Treasure Trap is the work of Irish-based development team Doodlebug Designs. Formerly known as Emerald Software, the boys have previously been responsible for Martech's Phantom Fighter and, more recently, Vigilante and Moonwalker for US Gold. Doodlebug's Brian Kelly originally came up with the idea for this underwater adventure, and admits that he took inspiration from 8-bit isometric classics such as Ultimate's Knight Lore and Alien 8. "This is a genre of game that grabbed our attention and resulted in many sleepless nights before we even entered the software industry," he explains. But when it came to Doodlebug designing one of its own, the team found that finding a setting for the game was one of the toughest tasks. "Before the cuddly deep-sea diver character was designed, we had discussed using nuclear power plants, medieval castles, submarines and spaceships for the scenario," reveals graphic artist Paul McLaughlin. The team finally settled for a sunken ship because of the possibilities it offered – and also because no-one had ever done it before. With the scenario settled, a whole wealth of names were suggested – including Howard Kelp Is The Depth Collector, Poon, Commotion In The Ocean, Bubble Trouble, Davey Jones Locker and Ship Of Gold before the team finally settled on Treasure Trap. A simplified version of the game was then knocked up, comprising 20 rooms and a small range of undersea enemies. With the game working in 'miniature' it was just a matter of making it bigger, badder and beefier. Now it's finished, Doodlebug is more than proud of it. As Brian Kelly puts it: "While it's not a totally new concept in game design, it blends the best features of arcade action with the intriguing nature of a puzzle game." And who are we to argue?



A It's strange that while games such as Ultimate's classics Knight Lore and Alien 8 (and all of the clones that they spawned) have proved immensely successful on 8-bit, little in the same vein has appeared on the ST, Amiga or PC. Apart from The Edge's Raffles (a conversion of its own 8-bit effort Inside Outing, reviewed in Issue Eight), there's been little else of note – which is all the more strange when you consider that these machines' superior capabilities are tailor-made for this kind of venture. Treasure Trap is the first 16-bit isometric perspective arcade adventure that actually succeeds in all departments. Graphically it's captured the same cute comic-book feel as its classic 8-bit counterparts, and the gameplay is every bit as devious – it's been well balanced between arcade action (you need nimble fingers to keep Howard alive in cabins full of sea monsters) and head-scratching puzzles. How do you get to that seemingly unreachable piece of gold on top of the packing crates – and then how do you get out alive? The sound deserves a special mention, adding to the comic charm of the proceedings. Howard shrieks a sampled 'Uh-oh' whenever he snuffs it, bubbles 'billooop' to the surface as he breathes – there's even a house remix of 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat' during the introduction! With over a hundred rooms to explore and solve it's certainly not for the impatient, but those who prefer a challenge with a little more depth (titter) will love it. Water super effort!

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GRAPHICS	90%
SOUND	91%
PLAYABILITY	89%
VALUE	80%
OVERALL	**88%**



Atari owners can sink to depths at the end of May at the same time as their Amiga-owning chums. Apart from the mandatory tinkerings in the sound department, it's business as usual.



CGA, EGA and VGA are all supported as are the Roland and AdLib sound cards. Expect it to surface in late May at an asking price of 24.99.

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RAF Pilot Officer David Crook.



"There were about twelve Me 109s diving at me from the sun and at least half of them must have been firing deflection shots at me. There was a popping noise and my control column became useless. I found myself doing a vertical dive, getting faster and faster. I pulled the hood back. I got my head out of the cockpit, and the slipstream tore the rest of me clean out of the machine."
RAF Pilot Officer Stevenson.

"There isn't much time to muck about in a head on attack. I gave a short burst then slid underneath his big black belly with only feet to spare, and flashed through the rest of the formation. I hadn't meant to cut it so close, and instinctively ducked as I saw wings, engines, cockpits and black crosses go streaking through my hood. I had reached about 450 mph in my dive, and heaved back on the stick. I blacked out completely as I went up and over in an enormous loop."
RAF Pilot Officer Boggle Bodie



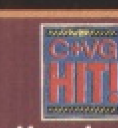
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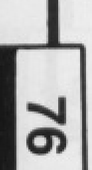
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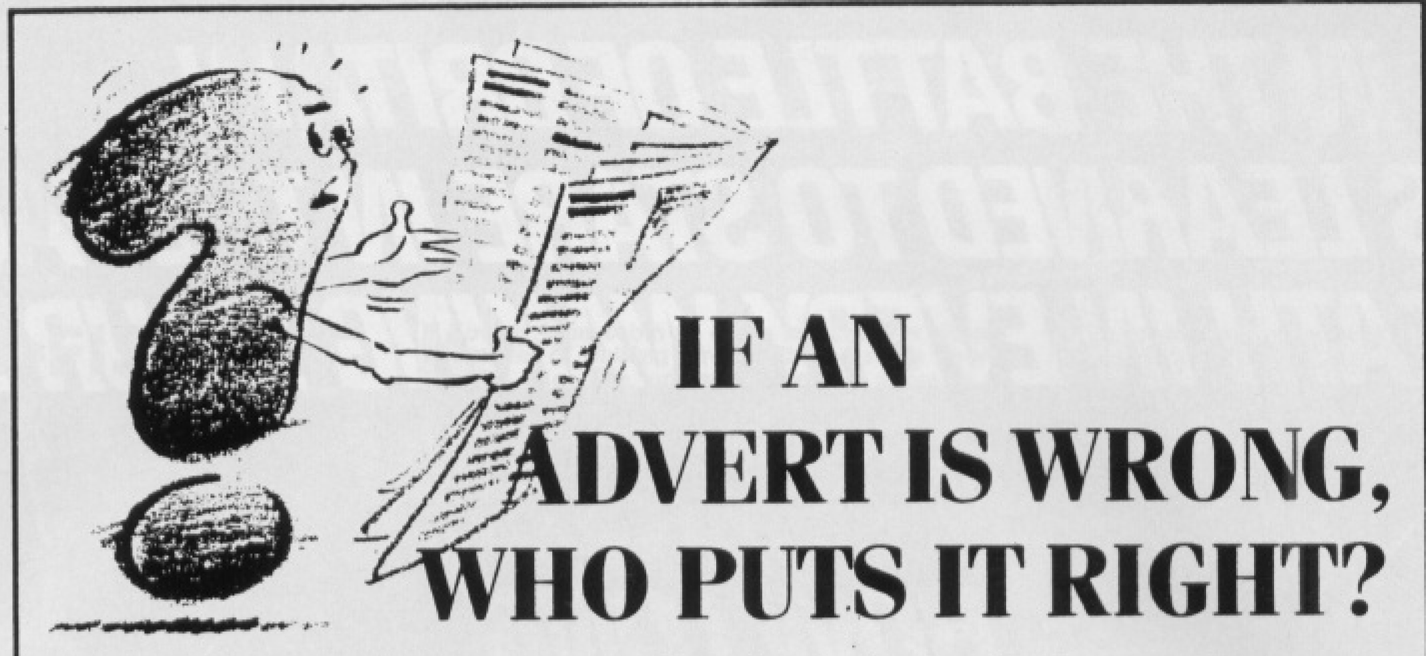
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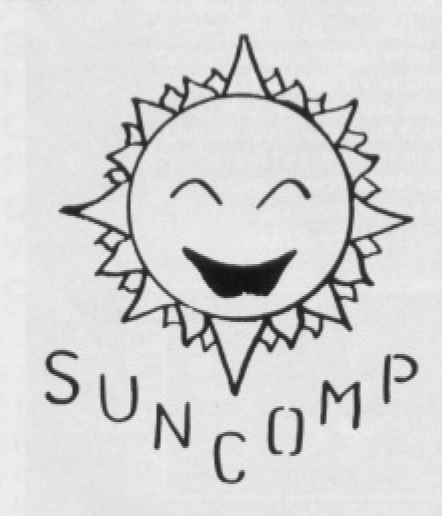
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REVIEW

Kid Gloves

Gary Penn boxes clever with Millennium's young contender.

The Kid of the title has just woken up to the sound of jungle drums. Putting on a pair of old boxing gloves he finds in his Uncle's study... and all of a sudden he's somewhere else.

The Kid has found himself in a place comprising five different Time Zones full of platforms and pests. Kid's trouble begins in the jungle, before his journey takes him through the Ice Age, the pyramids of Egypt and the psychedelic West Coast.

Kid walks, jumps and shoots his way across 10 screens in each zone. Discovering how to negotiate the moving platforms and platform arrangements is only part of the problem. There are a host of bizarre beings to avoid or destroy – bouncing Ogres, big bouncing snakes, mad girls and eyeballs to name but a few. Each screen presents a puzzle of sorts, with the answer arrived at by timely leaping, accurate shooting and a little lateral thinking.

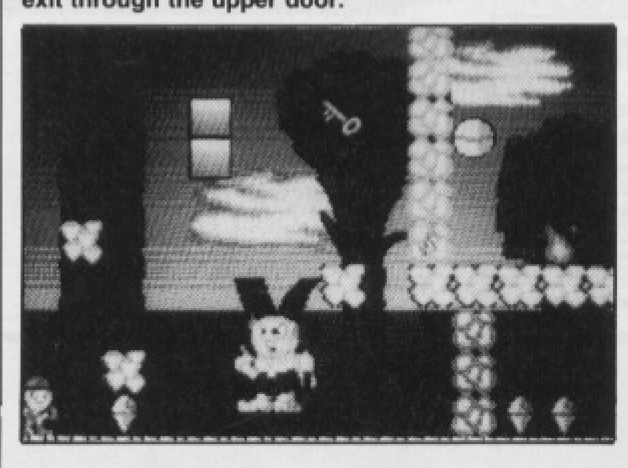
A tutorial or sorts teaches the Kid the facts of life. The first time you collect an item the screen splits and text tells you what the object's for. Food's there to be eaten for bonus points. A quartet of Ankhs provide an extra life, keys 'open' barriers and Smart Bombs are used to destroy everything in the vicinity. Fortunately all is not lost if Kid gets caught short of keys – he can always go 'back in time', ie: back three screens. However, he doesn't get any lives back in the process.

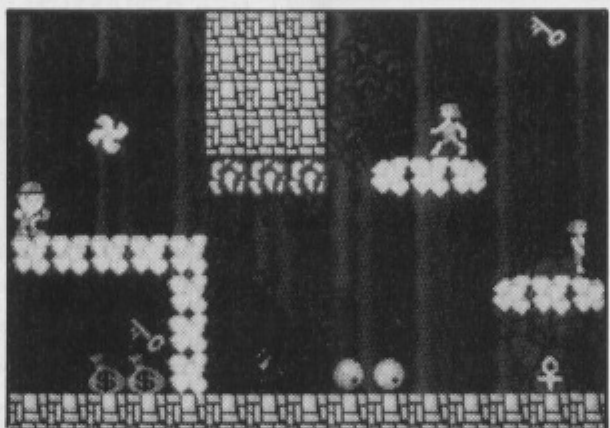




▲ The first screen's simple enough. But there are a few things to bear in mind for the later Screens. Use your keys wisely – if you do open a door by mistake, go back in time. Also, regularly flip between screens to avoid the 'Hurry Up!' monsters.

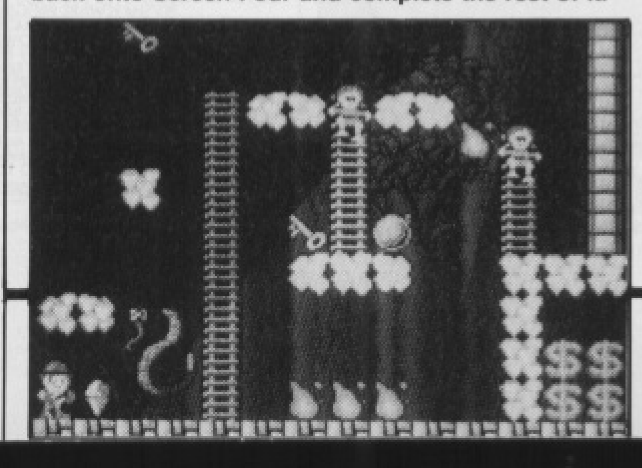
▼ Stand on the platform at the bottom left of the screen and shoot the Ogre. It takes five direct hits with the DeathCoin. Now walk off to the left and come back here – the eyes have gone, leaving a clear run between you and the key. Collect it, then jump to the ground and open the lower door. Walk through to the next screen and pick up the money and key – be quick, or the eyes will get you! Walk back to the second screen again and exit through the upper door.

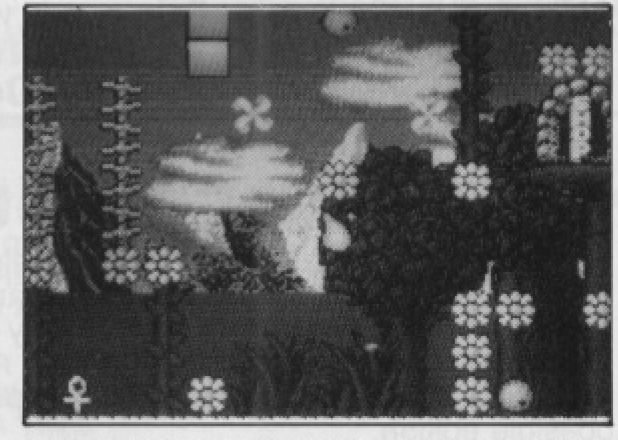




▲ When you get the cash and key, wait for a couple of seconds until a green demon appears – shoot it. Now when you re-enter this screen at the top, the green demon won't appear. Walk up to the three columns blocking your way. As soon as you touch the bottom brick, move away to avoid the falling blocks. Walk along to the end of the newly-created path, turn around and wait a couple of seconds until a girl comes running in from the left. Wait until she's almost on top of you before firing. Now turn around, jump straight up and fire twice to dispose of the other girls to your right. Collect the key, the oranges and the extra life Ankh.

▼ Enter this screen at the bottom and collect the ice cream. Walk back onto the previous screen and re-enter Screen Four from the higher platform. Walk to the end of the platform and shoot the big bouncing snake (it takes five shots). Jump up and get the key at the top of the screen. Run back to Screen Three, then back onto Screen Four and complete the rest of it.

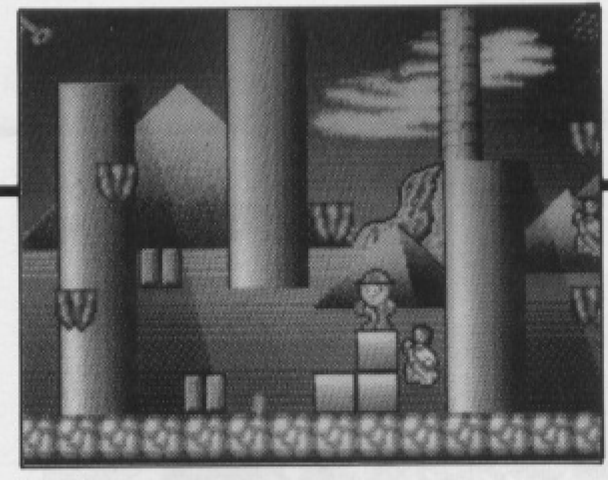




▲ As soon as you enter this screen, walk straight down the small gap and collect the extra life Ankh. Forget the four cash bags to the left of Screen Four for the time-being – open the door to the right. Stand on the little daisy and shoot the green demon. Wait for the Ogre to appear, then shoot him as he jumps up (it takes five direct hits to kill him). Now go back to Screen Four and back onto Screen Five again – otherwise fireballs appear. When you reappear, climb the second ladder and knock the two orange blocks to the ground. Walk onto them and jump onto the platform in the middle of the screen. Jump up and get the orange. When the other spinning star is as the top of the screen, walk off the platform onto the platform at the lower right-hand side of the screen. Don't jump or you'll open the door by the shop – this isn't necessary. Save your money for the Shop on Screen Nine.

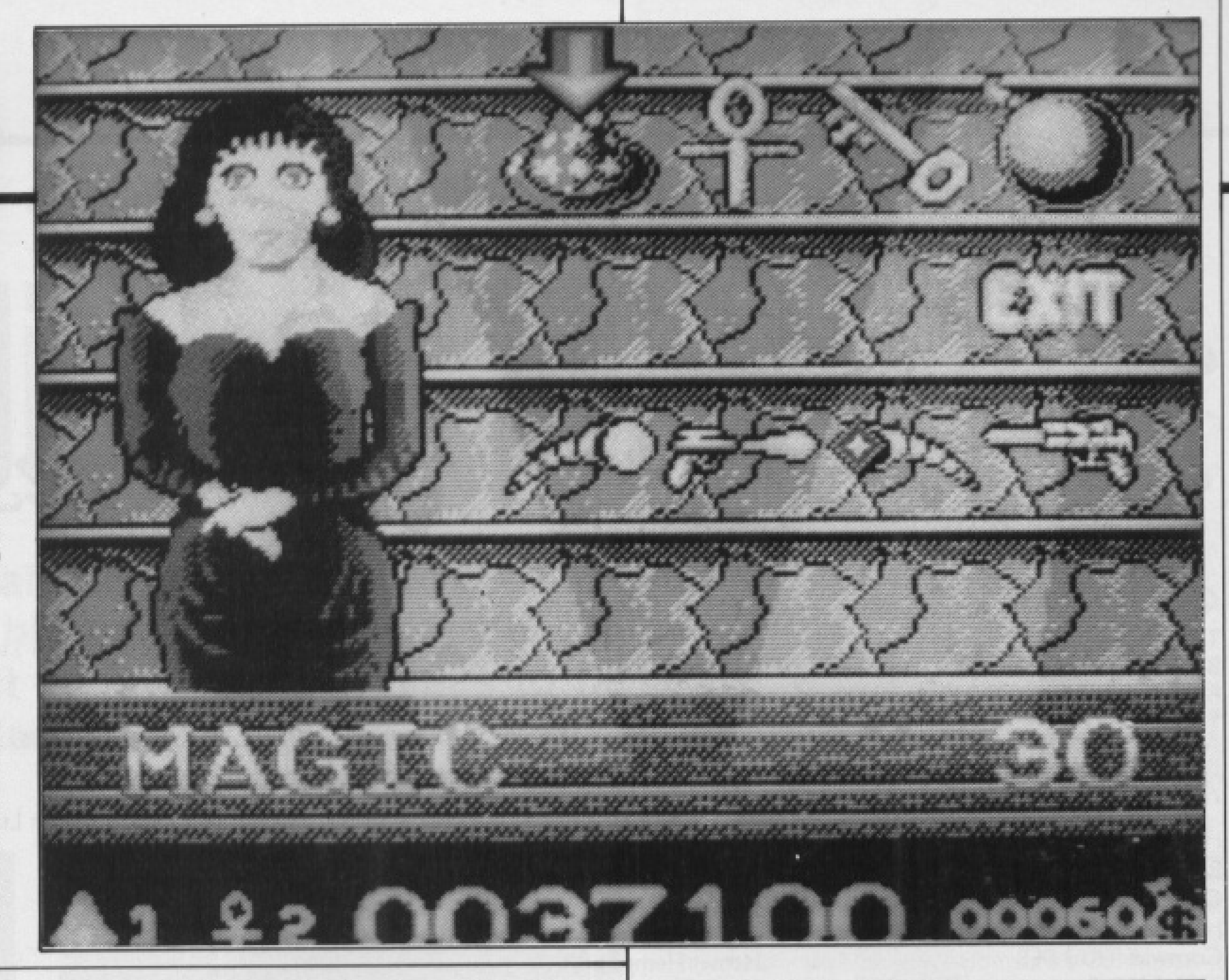
▼ As soon as you appear, stand your ground and shoot the demons until they die. Walk across the screen, collecting the money, and enter Screen Seven from the lower platform.





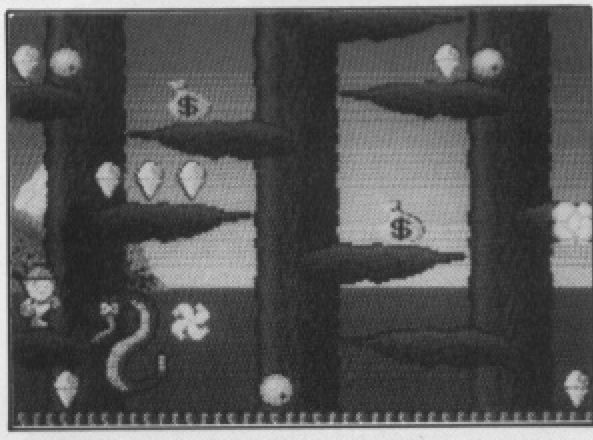
Kid's gloves are magical, but tragically not enough to remove his adversaries from the scene. Lucky he comes armed with a pair of DeathCoins. When thrown they bounce around the screen, disappearing after 10 seconds or so, or, better still, after they hit something.

To help quench Kid's thirst for action and adventure he can visit The Shop and buy some new gear with the cash he collected along the way. 'Can I help you?' the shopkeeper asks when you enter. And of course, she can. Equipment available includes the Mega Laser, Death Star, and Smart Bombs. Not forgetting six Magic Spells, of which there are two distinctly different types – those that affect the adversaries and those that alter the scenery. For example, activating the Sesame spell turns all doors into edible oranges (handy if you run out of keys), whereas the Slow Motion spell slows down some of the bad guys and Freeze stops some of them in their tracks. But only temporarily.



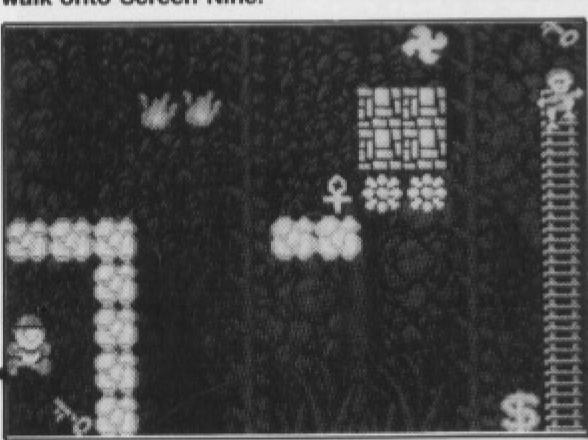
GLOSSING OVER THE FACTS

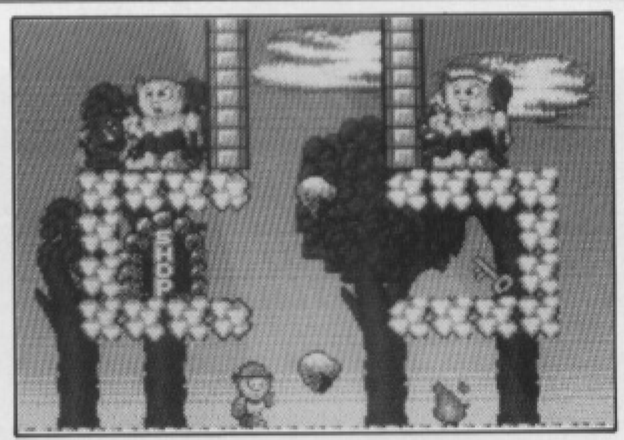
Kid Gloves is the 16-bit debut of 18-year old former Spectrum programmer Timothy Gloss. The name may not ring any bells, but chances are two of his games will... The budget beauties **I, Ball** and **I, Ball II** for Firebird are probably what he's best known for, but there were other attempts at commercial success beforehand – like Timothy's first ever release: **Bomber Bob** for Bug Byte. This 'tribute' to Tecmo's **BombJack** (which, for the record, was officially converted to 16-bit by Elite) surfaced five years ago, and was followed by a 400-room arcade adventure in the **Starquake** mould (16-bit originals courtesy of Mandarin) and entitled **Tremor** for US Gold. Before Timothy got bored with the Spectrum and moved to 16-bit he wrote a football game for Firebird called **European Five-Aside**. Out of all his games, Kid Gloves is the one he's enjoyed programming most: "I like playable games that aren't too difficult to get into. I don't like inch-thick manuals." Timothy likes to play the same sort of games as he writes, although he does favour shoot 'em ups – mainly in the arcades though, with **Salamander** and **R-Type** numbering among his favourites. "I did write a 16-bit shoot 'em up, but it never got released. I'm just don't seem to be able to write them properly." Sadly, Mr Gloss' first 16-bit game could be his last... "I'm concentrating on my Maths degree, so I won't have the time to program any more. Well, not unless money becomes a problem."



▲ Kill the snake (five shots are required) then make your way to the top left-hand corner of the screen, collecting items as you go. Walk back onto Screen Six and get the extra life Ankh. Quickly descend to the bottom right-hand of Screen Seven – if you're too slow, another snake appears. Walk onto Screen Eight and collect the key – but don't walk back onto Screen Seven just yet. Wait until three girls appear. Shoot them before walking back onto Screen Seven and re-enter Screen Eight from the higher platform.

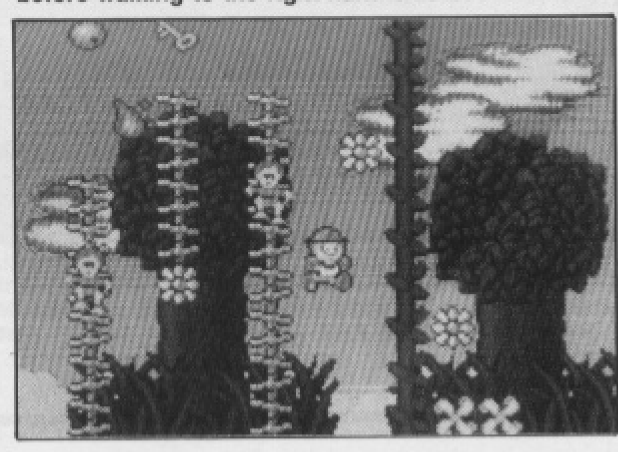
▼ When the two flies are in the lower half of the screen, jump across and collect the extra life Ankh. You should now have four Ankhs, which means an extra life. Walk off the platform, avoiding the fires, then get the key and walk onto Screen Nine.





▲ Jump onto the moving platforms in the middle of the screen. Stay near the top and kill all the monsters. Walk off the screen and come back on again. Now pop in the shop and buy some items. Pick up the key but leave the cash bags – it's a waste of a key (keys cost 50 coins, and the bags aren't worth that). Move onto Screen Ten.

▼ When you first appear on this screen, stay where you are. Shoot all the monsters from here – but leave the fireballs if they appear. With all the monsters out of the way, go back to Screen Nine and back onto Screen Ten. Now collect everything as quickly as possible before walking to the right-hand side of the screen.



ST

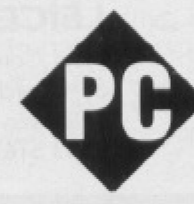
Anyone old enough to reminisce about the 'good old days' will find it difficult to stem the flood of memories after playing the first few screens of Kid Gloves. This jolly jump 'n' run romp is one of those simplistic, mentally undemanding but playable games – with some contemporary redecoration for good measure. The scenery's colourful and sufficiently varied, and most of the sprites have character – it's a shame the Kid's isn't more prominent. An impressive blend of AY-chip and sampled sounds complement the action, with a suitable array of SFX and speech ranging from the shopkeeper's welcoming 'Can I help you?' to the exclamation of 'Oh no!' when Kid dies. But Kid's not as pure as tradition should be... some of its more elaborate features like the spells and extra weapons tend to tarnish the finish, and the player isn't persuaded to make the most out of what's there – replacing rather than improving features is not the answer. Ultimately, this competent, uncomplicated entertainment lacks suitable 'rewards', which is surprising given its otherwise slick nature. But what the heck – it's game for a laugh.

PRICE	£24.95
RELEASED	Out Now
GRAPHICS	66%
SOUND	84%
PLAYABILITY	79%
VALUE	60%

OVERALL 77%



There's little to separate this version from what's seen here. Even the price and release date are the same.



If the other two versions prove to be a hit, then an MS–DOS Kid Gloves will happen before the year is out. In which case, EGA and VGA will be supported.

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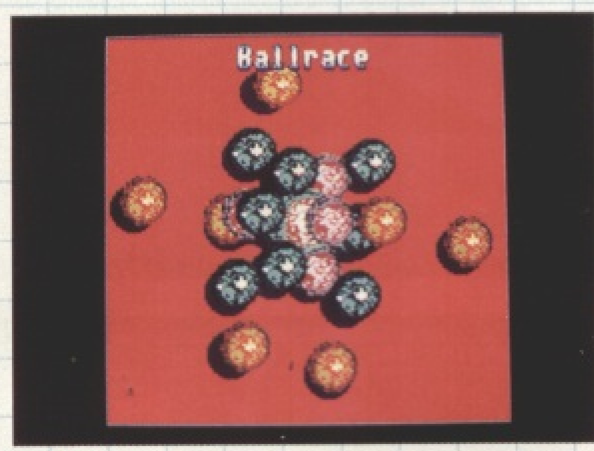
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Spindizzy II

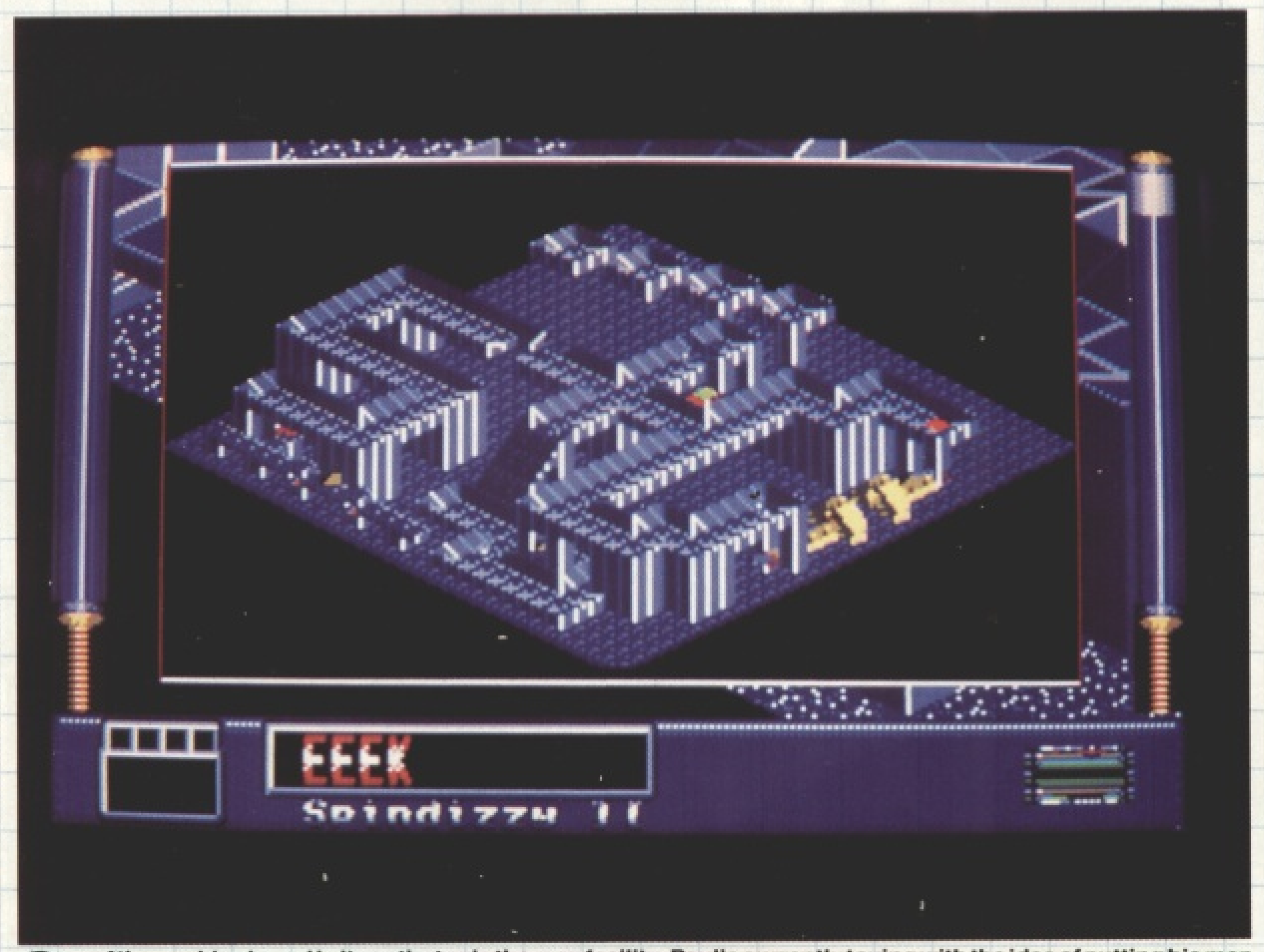
A sequel without an original? Not quite. Electric Dreams' Spindizzy was one of the biggest cult successes of the 8-bit universe. This 16-bit incarnation promises to be even bigger and better. Gary Whitta talks to its author, Paul Shirley.



Spindizzy II's level selector. Each level is a world, and they're arranged in their own little 'solar system'. There's a large central world, with the smaller ones placed around them. It's possible to rotate the system any way you like in order to get a better view. When a world is completed, it explodes and is removed from the map before you pick another.



Whereas the original Spindizzy was a flick-screen affair, in Spindizzy II, the worlds scroll in all directions. The result is quite similar to Electric Dreams' earlier isometric effort Incredible Shrinking Sphere. It also allows a lot more scope for gameplay, as it's possible for a particular puzzle or obstacle to be larger than one screen.



One of the worlds viewed in its entirety via the map facility. Paul's currently toying with the idea of putting his map editor, which he used to design this and the rest of the worlds, in the finished game, so that players can create their own levels. After all, it's already built into the current working version. "The only problem," he explains, "is that it's not a very simple utility, and to explain how it works, you'd need a manual about 30 or 40 pages long."

What is there to be said about Paul Shirley that hasn't already been said? Well, quite a bit actually. While more and more programmers come out of their shells and step into the limelight these days, Paul prefers to keep himself to himself.

The windswept and interesting nature of this man knows no bounds. He's even got a degree in Cybernetics, and as such is technically qualified to design missile systems!

Paul first came into contact with computers way back in the dim and distant past – and first impressions weren't too favourable: "The first computer I ever saw was a mainframe, which I used to play about with, but I hated it. I think in about 1973/74 I got an Oric which I really liked. I started programming at school, when the school got a whole load of Commodore PETs in, and I did some Oric stuff."

Paul got hold of an Amstrad CPC 464 when it first appeared, and the first thing he wrote on it – or at least the first thing that he's not too ashamed of to talk about – was Incentive Software's Confuzion in 1985. "I got the idea from an old coin-op called Katanga Tong where you had to slide the blocks about to make a picture," he reveals.

1986 saw the arrival of Shirley's biggest game to date – Spindizzy, which he claims came about almost by accident. "I had knocked up a routine to display isometric perspective graphics, and I saw Marble Madness, which gave me the 'rollaround' idea. I then set about designing a game along those sort of lines – but whereas Marble Madness is a race, Spindizzy is more of an adventure."

Spindizzy reached Number One in the Amstrad chart, as well as scooping armfuls of critical acclaim and achieving 'cult classic' status on the 8-bit machines. In fact such was its success that an ST version was very nearly produced way back then, as Paul explains: "Electric Dreams proposed the idea of doing an ST version after the 8-bits came out, but it never really happened."

With Spindizzy under his belt, Paul went on to produce two shoot 'em-ups in succession – the 8-bit budget blaster Mission Genocide for Silverbird in 1987 and, more recently, last year's excellent 16-bit multi-level massacre Quartz for Firebird. Both games, Paul reveals, started life like Spindizzy, as nothing more than impressive graphics routines. Mission Genocide grew out of an impressive hardware-scrolling routine that Paul had written for the Amstrad, while Quartz was born of an eight-way parallax-scrolling program.

And now with Paul's feet planted firmly on 16-bit soil – he's not touched his Amstrad or 64 for nearly three years – he's currently hard at work on the 16-bit 'sequel' to Spindizzy. But why now – and why at all? "Because I need the money – really. And also because Activision kept asking me if I was going to do it, and I finally said yes. And I suppose there are also a few ideas that I never managed to get into the original that I can do here."

Paul is keen to stress that Spindizzy II isn't really a sequel in the true sense, it's more a revamped version of the original – sort of Spindizzy Plus. In fact, as Paul points out, the name Spindizzy II is likely to be dropped in favour of something more appropriate before the game finally appears sometime around September. "The game's currently being developed under two names – Spindizzy II and Spindizzy Worlds, which is what the version I'm working on at the moment is called."

The game itself is best described as an isometric-perspective arcade adventure. The idea, with you cast as the intergalactic cartographer GERALD, is simply to 'map out' all of the worlds in the Spindizzy universe by visiting every screen on

each one (a map is automatically drawn up as you progress) and collect gems along the way. But it's not as easy as it sounds. Most of the playfield is devilishly designed so that either pixel-perfect dexterity or shrewd lateral thinking (and in many cases, both) is required to progress – oh and the marauding aliens don't help much either. Spindizzy's best appreciated by those with a longer-than-average fuse.

Paul promises that in Spindizzy II, the actual gameplay is still pretty much the same as it ever was. However, there are a number of significant twists and enhancements to make Spindizzy II more than just a straight upgrade. "What this is, is basically Spindizzy on a MUCH bigger scale," Paul enthuses. "It's made up of 50 worlds – which in the final version will be individually named – each of which is likely to be between eight to 16 times bigger than the levels in the original. The finished game should be at least four times the size of the original."

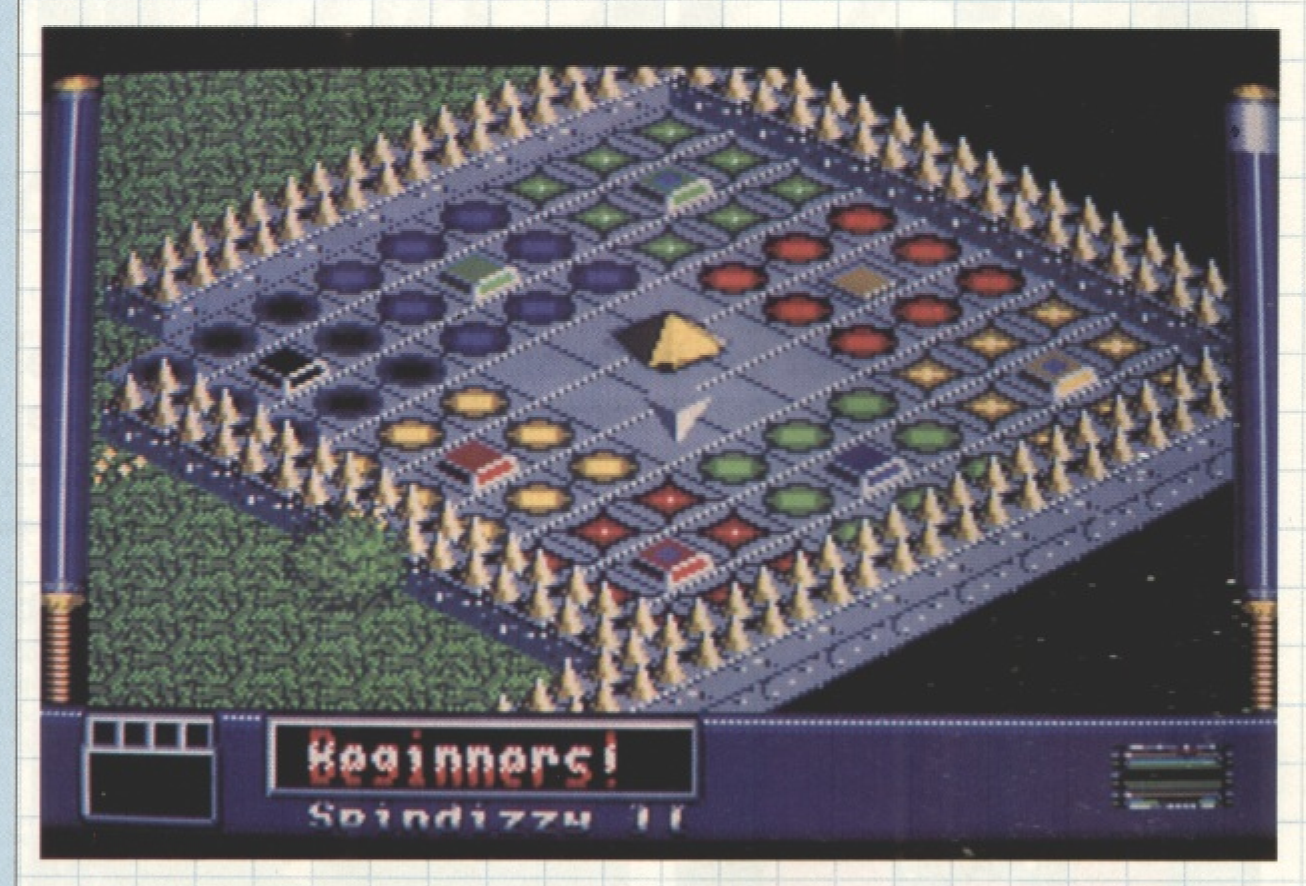
The way in which the levels have been designed and laid out allows the player to jump to and from the various levels with the use of teleports. With this system, it's possible to go about completing the game in virtually any way you like, because the levels can link in any way you like. There are even a few secret levels!

Paul's been working on Spindizzy II for nearly eight months now – preferring to develop on the ST rather than the Amiga, even though Commodore's baby has been becoming more popular with programmers of late. "I'm really not keen on the Amiga – the ST is so much easier to program. But I am using the Amiga in a sense. I've got it hooked up to the ST via the serial port and I'm using it as a slave processor." Software-wise, Paul writes using commercial utilities. He's using GFA FastBasic for Spindizzy II, but he has produced a few tricks of his own to make life a little easier – including the program that enables him to link the ST and Amiga together in the way that he has.

Despite the fact that it's not due for release until the latter part of the year, Paul's already got most of the donkey work out of the way. The level editor program was the first thing he wrote, and now he's busy using it to design the Spindizzy worlds themselves – he's already done about half of them, but as he's quick to point out, it's not easy: "You've no idea how difficult it is – and how boring it can be – designing levels. But I'm spending all my time doing that now, and it's coming along quite nicely," he says. "At the moment what's there is playable – it's just a bit rough, and some tinkering is needed."

It must be stressed that all the graphics you see here are Paul's own 'scratch' graphics that he's knocked up purely for the purposes of testing the game, and to give Activision an idea of how it's coming along. The graphics that will appear in the final game are being handled by Anna Williams, who's previously provided binary brushwork for the Electronic Pencil Company's Zoids and The Fourth Protocol on 8-bit.

Music and sound is in the capable hands of Martin Walker – the man behind Hunter's Moon on the C64, who's been doing several bits and bobs for Activision of late. Any chance of some new age vibes to compliment the surreal nature of the game? "No way." says Paul. "I've told Activision that I want a Thrash Metal soundtrack, but I think that they've toned that down to Heavy Metal in the final brief to Martin." But what about the heavy guitar riffs and so on. Surely the poor old ST is going to have its work cut out in that department? "I don't think so. If necessary it'll be sampled, and the ST is much more efficient at manipulating sound, even when it is sampled."

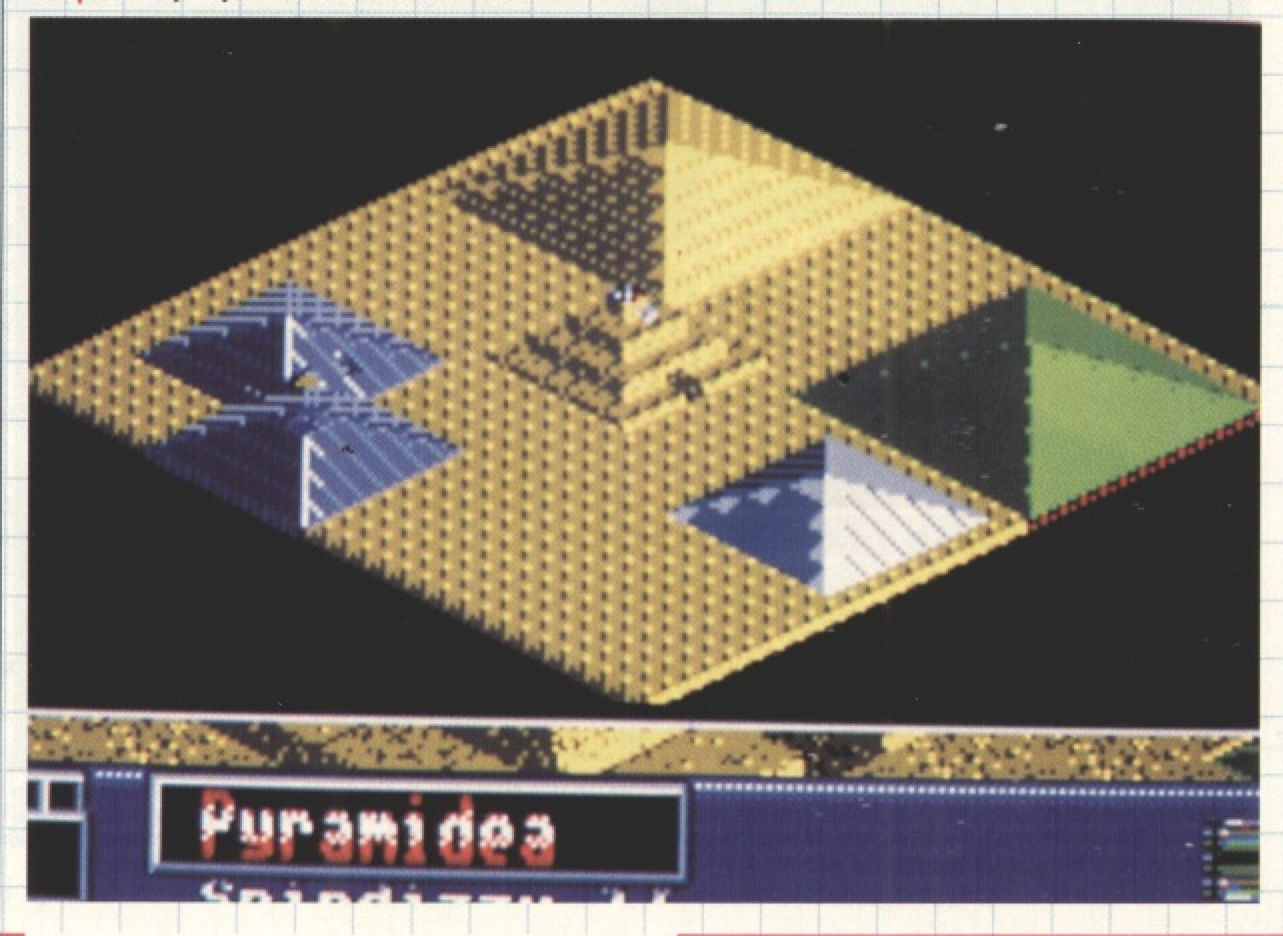


Much of Spindizzy II's puzzle element stems from the use of switches. These buttons set into the floor are turned on and off by moving over them, and have different effects, depending on their colour. Generally they're used to reveal previously hidden or sealed-off parts of a world. But it's not quite as simple as that. Some switches are connected, so turning on one could turn off another, making things even trickier for the player.



This world (which at the moment is called Ballrace), provides a spot of arcade-style variety. No puzzles or switches to contend with here – just a Marble Madness-style rollercoaster ride to the bottom, collecting the spinning gems along the way.

You can see why this level is provisionally entitled Pyramid World – it's an Egyptian extravaganza. And the Pyramids aren't just there for show – you can actually go inside them, and climb up through the levels! As you move up through the pyramid, space logically becomes tighter and tighter until you reach the very top, where there's hardly any room to manoeuvre at all.





INTRODUCE



A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

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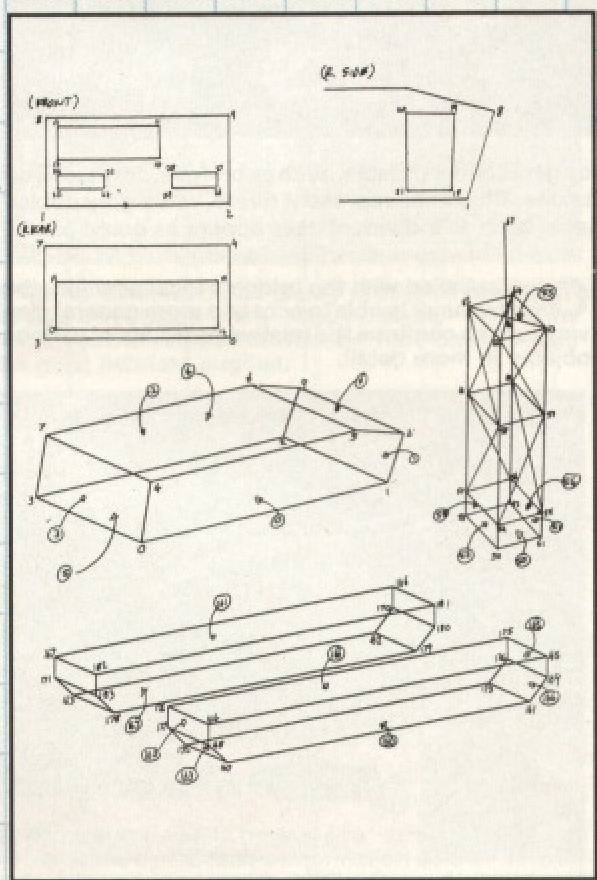


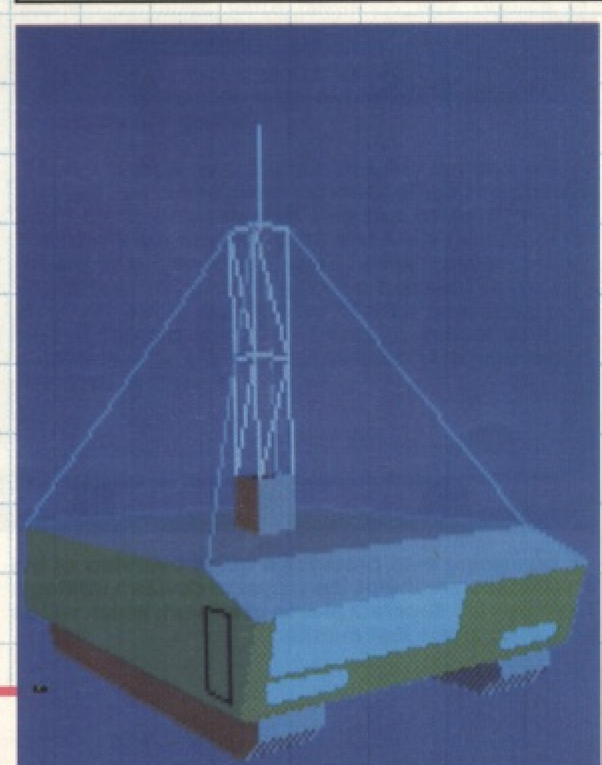
Realtime

Realtime, the team behind Carrier Command, is about to unleash its first games for 18 months. In his own time, Gordon Houghton warped to Leeds to nail down Battle Command and Duster.

The Realtime squad, from left to right: Ian Oliver, Steve Caslin, Richard Moorhouse, Andy Onions, Steve Hey, Graeme Baird, and Mark Scott. They describe themselves minimally as 'programmers', and see work as a process of collective responsibility.

Objects are designed on paper first, most of them constructed from a series of sub-routines. This enemy radio and command post is composed of tracks, body and mast, the body further defined by a set of markings (surface detail) which varies according to an individual machine's power. These sub-routines are used time and again to create new objects – the tracks are slotted onto other tanks, for example. All objects need to be defined with numbers to generate an identity in 3D space: the plain numbers represent points, those in circles indicate faces.







An attack 'copter thunders overhead in Battle Command. The basic plot puts you in control of a super-tank, which can be kitted out with missiles, mortars, bombs, night-sights and other toys. It's similar to Carrier Command in some respects, particularly in elements of the visual presentation and the availability of natty bolt-on extras. The strategy element is different, however – whereas Carrier Command required a lot of advance thinking and a warp mode to cut out between-island boredom, Battle Command sorts out the wheat from the chaff and opts for an 'action highlights' presentation.

Once constructed on paper, this is how the finished product appears on screen, waiting to be inserted into the game design. Graeme Baird creates most of the objects for Battle Command using Realtime's Object Definition Language (ODL) on a Compaq, something he describes as: "Very definitely a language rather than an editor or tool – it isn't that flexible, but it does what you want it to do." Objects feature varying degrees of complexity according to the power of individual machines, on a scale from the Tandy (minimal) to fast 386 PCs (very detailed).

Realtime's creative philosophy is summarised by head honcho Ian Oliver: "We have a different approach to games from most people – we're more technology-driven, keener on the esoteric side of game design. We want to do things that are innovative, different and interesting to us." The company has a policy of constantly testing out new hardware for its products, which explains why Carrier Command has appeared on just about every format under the sun. The latest version is just about to materialise on the Mac.

Work is carried out on individual machines and cross-translated to other formats. Assembling is no trouble since the team uses its own assembler (Snasm) to produce the ST, Amiga and Mac code. Snasm was developed in conjunction with Vektor Grafix, and is most remarkable for its speed, as Ian illuminates: "Translating the Mac version of Carrier,

it assembled 55,000 lines of code and loads of data in 16 seconds. We're getting there with the debugger, too." Most of the PC groundwork is done on Compaqs, with Optasm taking on the assembler role.

Ian would like to see Realtime grow into developing new techniques and systems for internal and external use, in effect generating the programs and technology which will make life easier for other people: "At the moment we're typecast as producers of large-scale 3D epics, which isn't something we've done deliberately."

Realtime doesn't want to drop games altogether though: "We're very much into hardware and software design – anything that involves slinging a lot of solder around." Some of these ideas have been realised in conjunction with Vektor, but with a few degrees in electronic engineering on the staff, Realtime is capable of going its own way. Andy Onions, for example, is currently designing a prototype video card which will connect to any computer.

BATTLE COMMAND

Battle Command has been under development for about 18 months, concurrent with Carrier Command at its inception. The major difference between the two, apart from the switch in emphasis from strategy to arcade, is the graphics system. Ian Oliver explains: "It needed sprucing up. The graphics system on PC Carrier, for example, was an 8086 version of the 68000 code. That version was, in turn, a version of the old 8-bit graphics system. This new one is a radical change and should last us some time, give or take a few developments along the way. The only thing we need now is a name for it!"

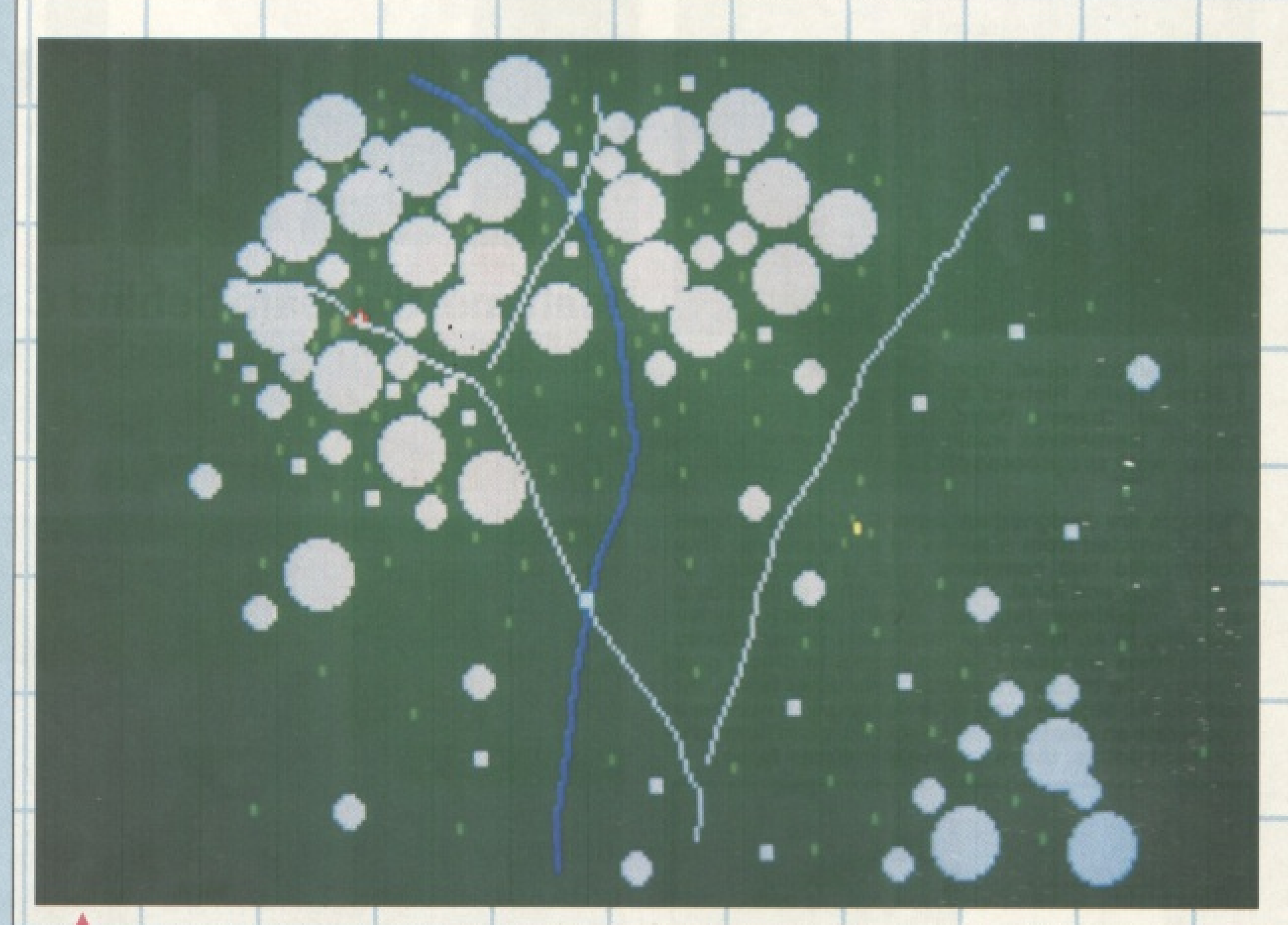
Like Carrier, Battle Command also has its roots in the late, lamented Telecomsoft, though "for reasons of mutual self-interest" it didn't come as part of the Microprose buyout package. Although it's now to be published by Ocean, it was, and remains, wholly Realtime's design, a response to what the company envisages as public demand – Ian describes it as: "The kind of high-profile top-end product 16-bit users want nowadays."

The basic plot puts you in control of a super-tank, which can be kitted out with missiles, mortars, bombs, night-sights and other toys. It's similar to Carrier Command in some respects, particularly in elements of the visual presentation and the availability of natty bolt-on extras. The strategy element is different, however – whereas Carrier Command required a lot of advance thinking and a warp mode to cut out between-island boredom, Battle Command sorts out the wheat from the chaff and opts for an 'action highlights' presentation.

It's a breakaway from the original Telecom game which incorporated another world-model like Carrier: originally it featured a whole peninsula with one major target to destroy and several installations on the way – but the old problem of inter-action boredom reared its sleepy head. It was redesigned to create the mission-based version currently under development.

The difference couldn't be more marked, as Richard Moorhouse explains: "Basically, you're told about the mission, given the chance to choose weapons and thrown straight in there." If you succeed, it's pints all round; if not, you try again.

The groundwork is mostly complete: the code is written, objects designed, the map designer created and the tactics almost finished. The next process is the most fun, as Ian explains: "We're just going to let our imaginations run riot, create our own missions and then test them out on each other."



The map designer is the basis for Battle Command's mission generation. Objects, such as bridges, are placed on the map and are automatically generated in three dimensions. Blue lines represent rivers, while grey circles depict objects such as hills, trains and forests: smaller objects such as individual trees appear as green pixels.

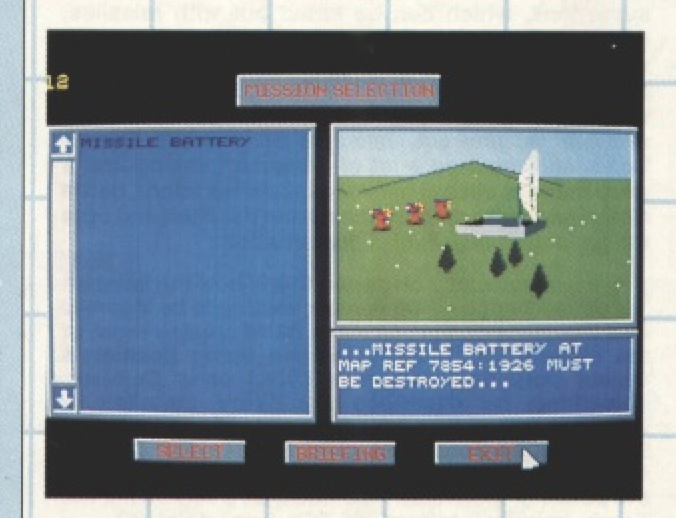
However, dropping the bridge on the map designer where the road crosses the river is just the first stage. Once placed, some objects still need to 'driven' into position.

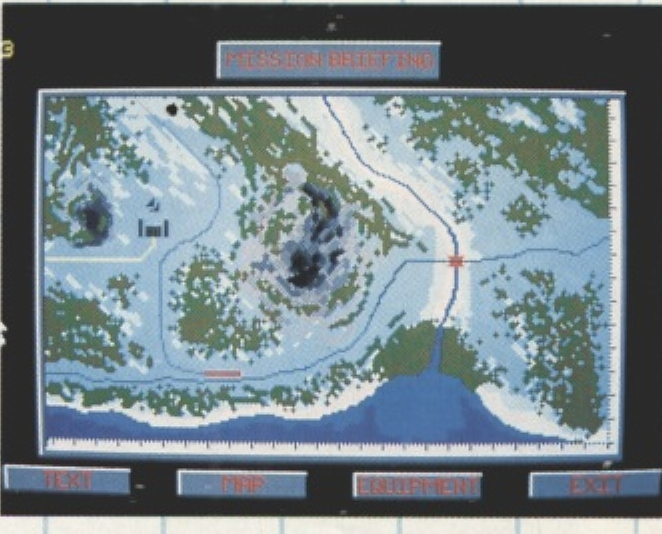


Once satisfied with the bridge's local position, the programmer is able to access a more general plan view, which confirms the relative positions of various objects in more detail.

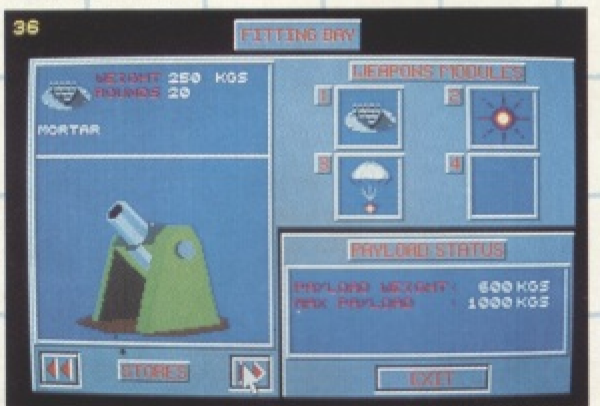


Battle Command's action structure consists of a number of short missions attempted in any order. The only restrictions are equipment-based: some early assignments involve collecting the add-ons for later ones.

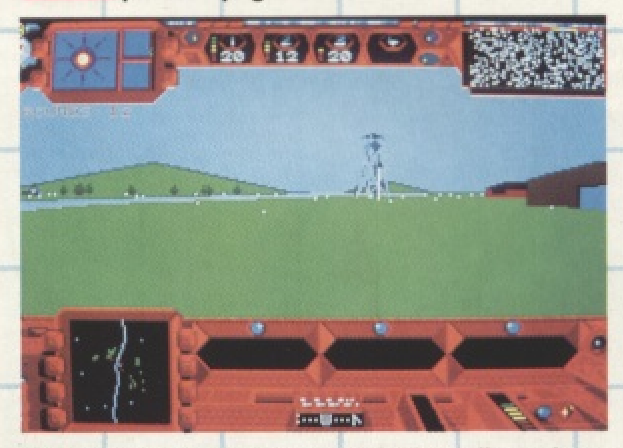




An in-game map provides a quick overview of the situation and helps the player to devise a strategy. The maps are separate pieces of artwork which will be bolted on at the last minute.



A more detailed mission briefing is provided when the assignment has been chosen. Battle Command is much more of a complex arcade-style game than its predecessor: the early assignments involve blasting seven shades of polygon out of everything (destroying two enemy installations, for example); but the later ones require half a dozen steps before completion – and a lot of problem-solving along the way. As Ian Oliver enigmatically observes: "The answers aren't always obvious."

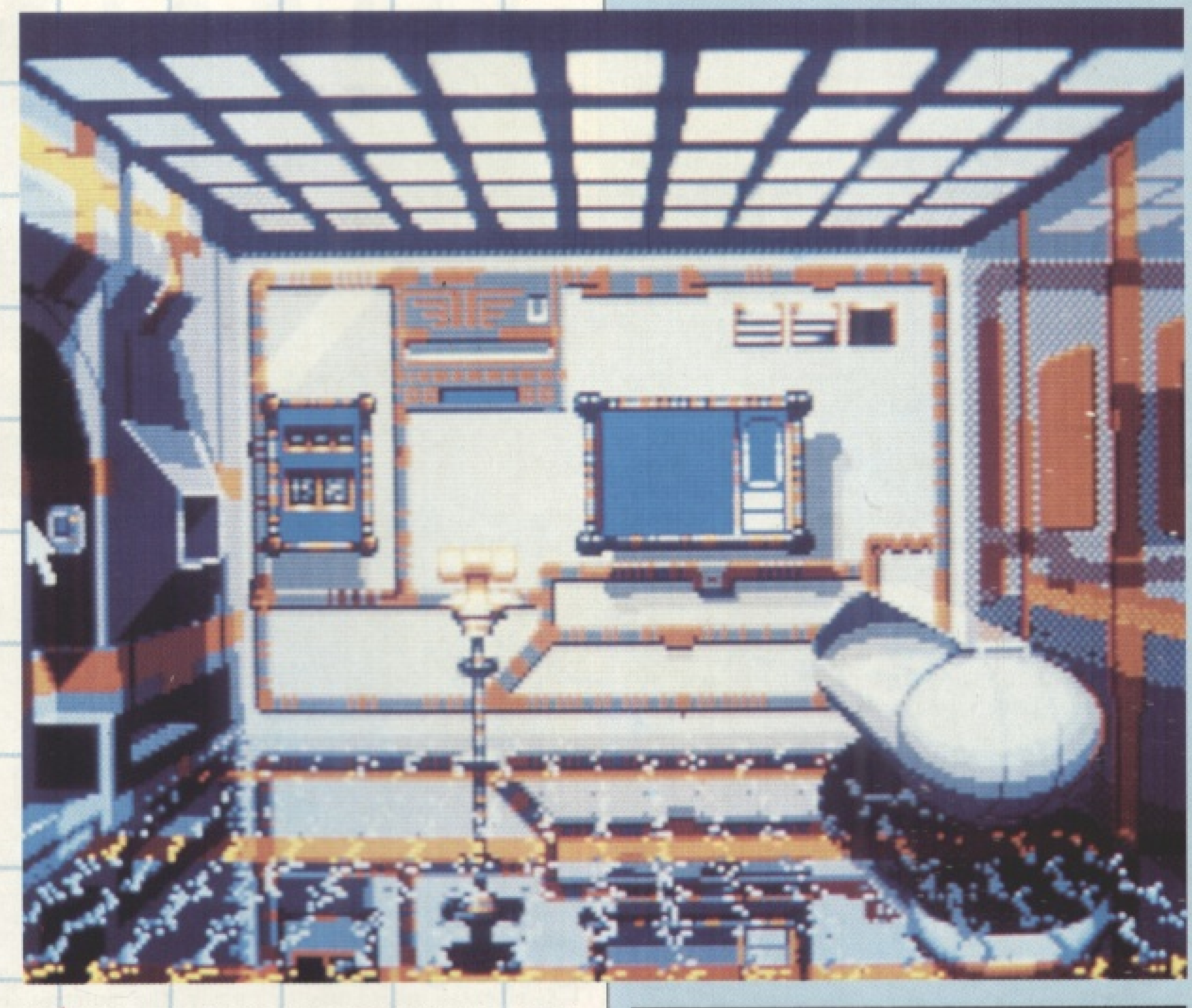


Carrier Command had plenty of toys to keep even the stroppiest child happy; Battle Command continues the tradition with enough add-ons to please the most petulant pugilist.

The battleground is portrayed in three dimensions, bordered by the tank's information boxes: weapon selected, payload, extra modules, and rounds of ammunition. The area covered with white noise is reserved for special features such as night-sights: the graphic display has various tones of daylight from bright sunshine to total darkness (where only silhouettes are visible).

Enemy tactics are plotted roughly on the office notice board and given a dose of crucial cogitation before being implemented (the two cartoon people shown here are Graeme Baird and Andy Onions). The artificial intelligence has eaten up the most programming time so far, and the tactics are almost complete. Ian Oliver spills the beans: "Tanks can stalk you through forests, avoiding trees, or retreat around mountains when hit. The next problem is to get them to drive over bridges."

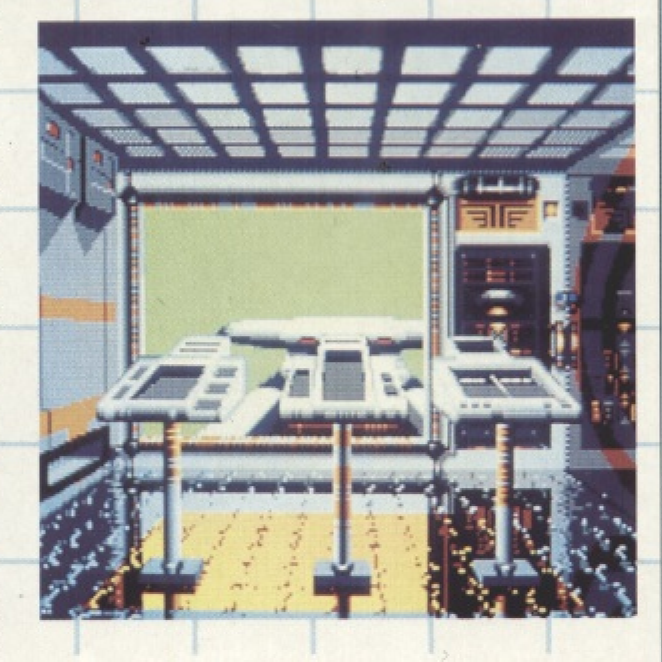


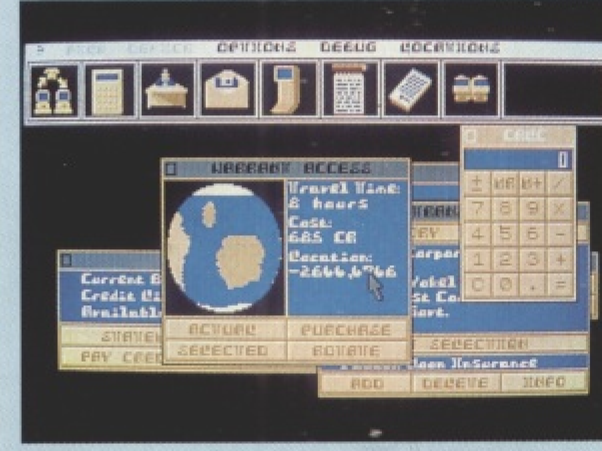


Your living quarters lie at the heart of the game. This is divided into two areas, the more important part of which is the office. Your personal business strategy determines the success of your game – and there's plenty of business to be done, such as communications, buying and selling goods, gaining travel warrants and bartering.

The office features its own computer systems loosely based on the flexibility of a Mac. Drag menus around, use the calculator to work out your profit and loss, get hassled by your bank manager, phone suppliers – it's all in there. Game Time runs in different ways according to your actions: perform certain deeds and the clock automatically accelerates – essentially, this is a warp mode feature to eliminate boredom.

The second part of your living quarters allows access to the duster: once refuelled or repaired and fitted with provisions, clicking on the door takes you into the 3D action mode. An interesting sideline is the ability to enter races and win prizes.





DUSTER

When the first settlers landed on the planet Heaven it was an idyllic environment, but the indigenous fauna underwent dramatic evolutionary mutation, to the extent that giant insects and other creatures are now roaming the world and destroying whole communities. Dusters – originally crop-sprayers in the good old days – soon discovered that a fortune could be made in the new profession of infestation extermination.

It's a game with as much strategy as shooting, as much bureaucracy as blasting the back legs off beetles: the action is shared between the two environments of business and destruction. Success is measured in terms of extermination contracts: the number and the efficiency with which you carry them out. To enhance the atmosphere, Realtime has also attempted to infuse it with a sub-culture: "A kind of trucker society with its own jargon, clubs and bulletin boards," explains Ian Oliver. "There are several races, each with its own lionised activity."

There hasn't been any conscious inspiration, although Harry Harrison's Deathworld trilogy deals with mutating monsters and the effects on mankind

which has to struggle to survive. Ian emphasises its originality: "I like to think that Duster falls into the same category as Carrier... in that it doesn't fall into any other category."

Much of the game specification was prepared before Christmas, though the team's only officially been working on the project for Mirrorsoft since January. Most of the work until now has gone into areas you don't see – refining the graphics system, for one. Graeme Baird explains: "It's the same system as Battle Command, but we've made it more flexible – it's now able to concentrate more on animation, desktops and sub-screens, as well as accommodating the colour dimming used in Battle Command." This animation factor is one of the major visual differences between the two games – Duster is better at making objects look organic, since insects, for example, require more articulation than tanks to appear credible on screen. Graeme explains: "A lot of work goes into making a scorpion move its head and snap its pincers: it needs to look alive."

At the moment Duster's about 30 per cent complete, with much of the game's substance still to be input: desktop machinery, 2D and 3D animation, background implementation, communication with other characters, police vehicles, bureaucracy – all of these elements are needed to flesh out the skeleton.

Work is started at different points on different machines: the PC version, for example, is currently based around the three dimensional sequences, mutation stages, weapons, bombs and craft aerodynamics. The ST version, on the other hand, is taking a stab at the strategic elements. Ian Oliver explains the process: "As soon as we finish one aspect, we swap and do a conversion of what the others have done."

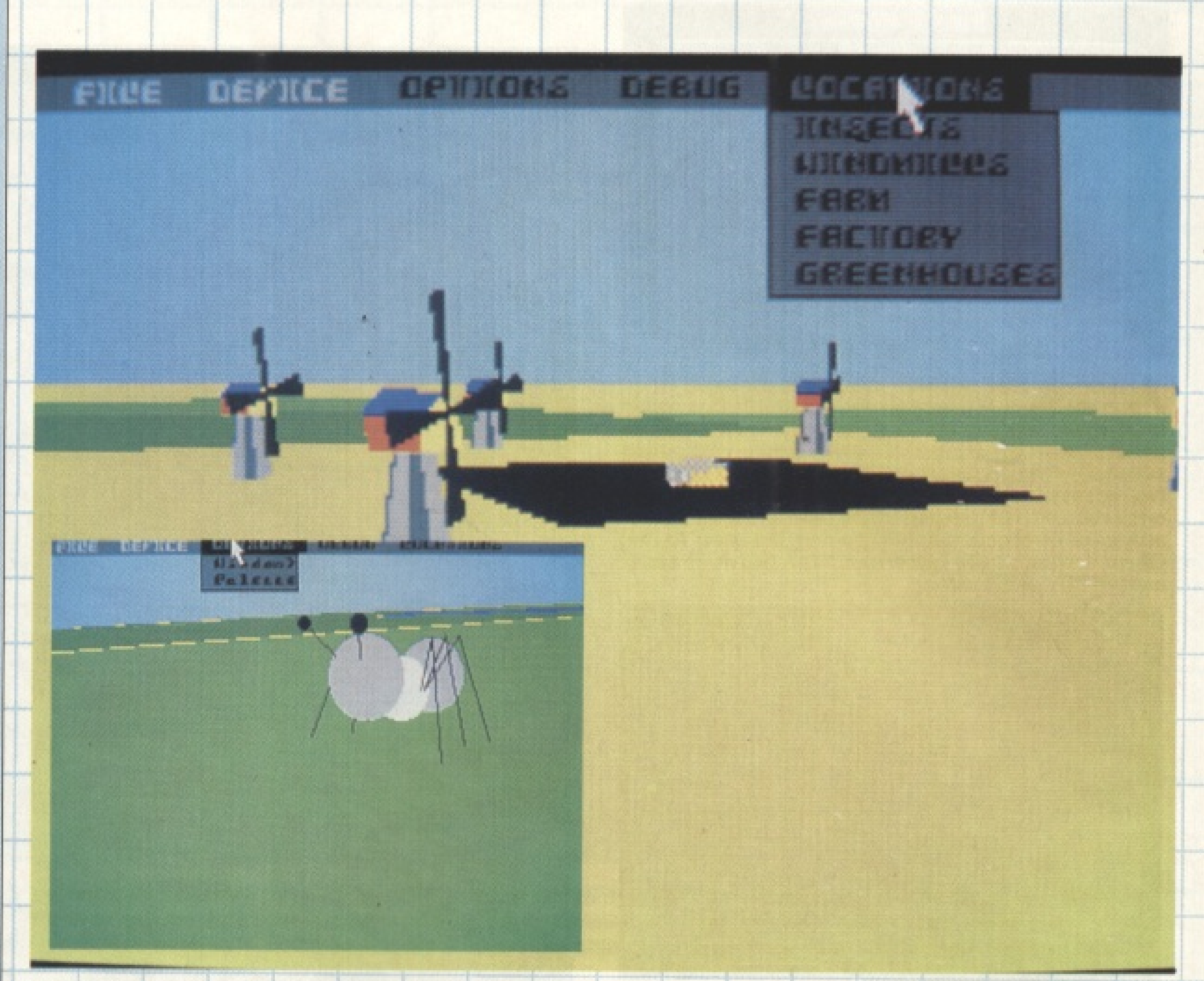
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO EPT?

EPT was intended to be one of the biggest games of all time – a kind of Elite with bells on. In practice it leapt happily off the drawing board but never progressed beyond the embryo development stage. Ian Oliver remembers it half-fondly as: "Perhaps the ultimate space opera – a project which we didn't create and weren't programming until Telecomsoft attempted to rescue it. The game design was wonderful, but not programmable – it would have taken decades. The specification alone was two inches thick – a major work of literature which would have made a great science fiction novel."

EPT played host to several different alien races dotted around the universe, each with its own distinctive space station design. These complexes were vast, with thousands of rooms and opportunities for interaction. To enter you simply had to fly into a central access hole.

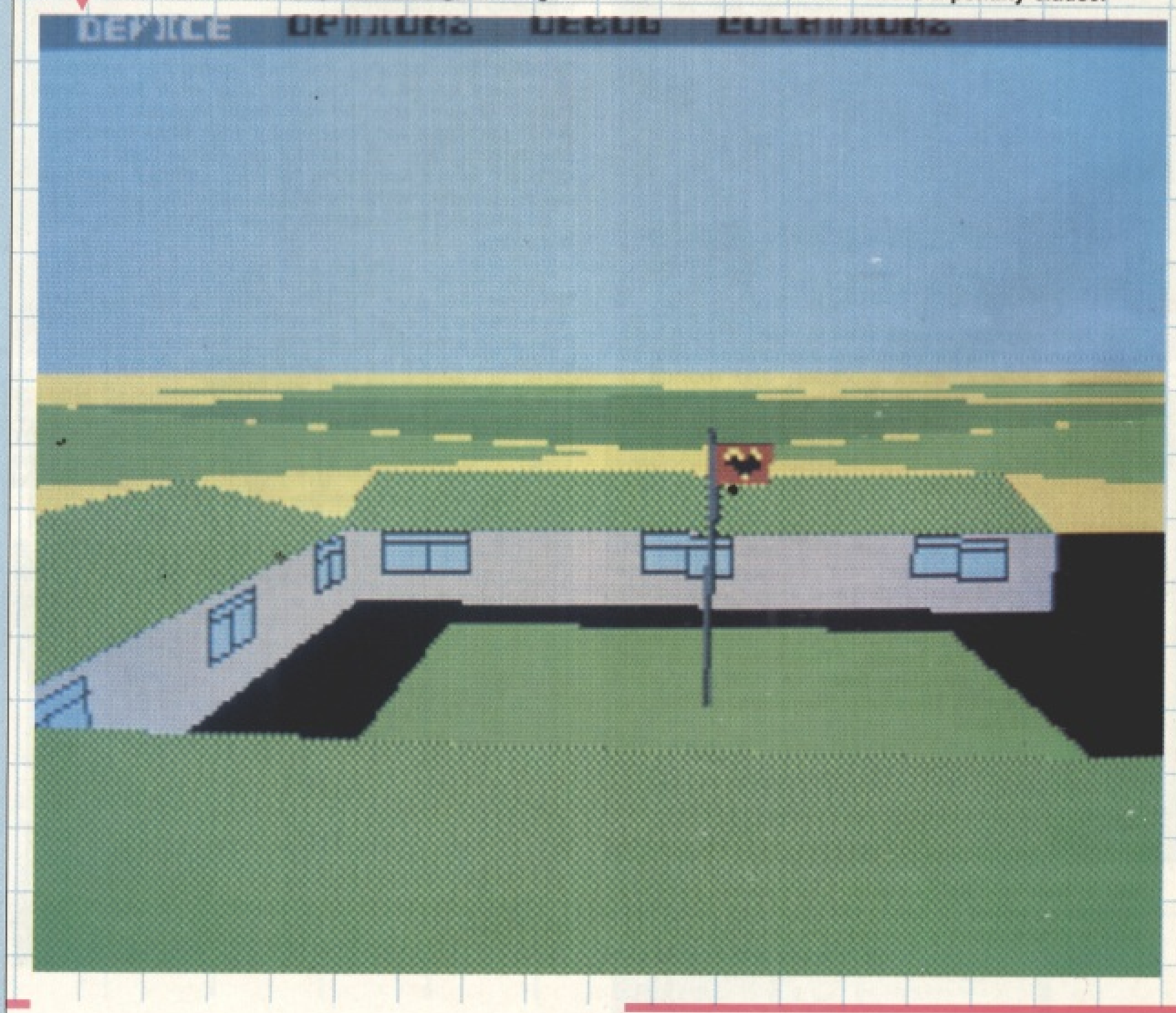
But the major problem with game design was its complexity, of which ship aerodynamics was just one minor aspect. Every craft had a calculated mass which affected its navigation – armour formed part of this equation, and each time a craft was hit, its shield was reduced and the total ship mass needed to be re-examined and adjustments to handling made. Any loss of weight – cargo, people, shields – affected the action to subtle degrees. Spread this small example across the hundreds of ship designs from small one-man fliers to huge freighters, and the scale of the problem can be appreciated.

Realtime says it has no plans to resurrect it, and isn't even sure who owns the publishing rights anymore. It could never have been sold in America under that name anyway: the US public associates the initials with a popular product called 'Early Pregnancy Test'.



Bug-bashing is made all the harder since insects like these evolve at a phenomenal rate, and have to be eradicated before they turn nasty. The mutation stages are frightening: simple walking ants can develop through spitting, flying, burrowing and swarming stages. It's the kind of game that has you scratching unconsciously, what Ian Oliver defines as "the product of a diseased mind."

Extermination is the name of the game in the wide world of contractual obligation – and there's plenty of trouble to be found around farmyard buildings. Failing to fulfill the contract on time incurs a penalty clause.



RESOLUTION 101





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MILLENNIUM

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Tribal

What do you get when you cross a feline future sport with Brian Nesbitt? A tail of jelly and the cat's whiskers.

Once upon a time, Eldritch The Cat was on the way to the vet. Obviously fearing the worst, he leapt out of the taxi, hurled himself down the nearest alleyway and was never seen again. So, when Steve Wetherill set up his own business with Marc Dawson some time later, it seemed natural to call it Eldritch The Cat, in memory of their furry friend (who, incidentally, was named after Andrew Eldritch from Sisters Of Mercy).

The pair met in 1984 when they were both working at Software Projects, publisher of such all-time classics as Jet Set Willy and Manic Miner. Marc came into games programming through business software, Steve via the drum machine used by the band he was in. It was driven by a Spectrum and once he realised he could also use it to play games, he got hooked on Manic Miner: not long after he was actually converting it for the Amstrad CPC.

After a spell at Odin, the twosome set up shop independently and worked on various games including Astaroth and Army Moves. Tribal, to be published by Electronic Arts, has been in the pipeline for around a year.

Inspired by Air Hockey, Crossfire and flick-to-kick Subbuteo, the basic idea is simple: opposing teams whizz about a pitch on low-friction jet disks attempting to score goals. Eight teams compete in a league or knockout competition and play under varying conditions on a selection of different grounds.

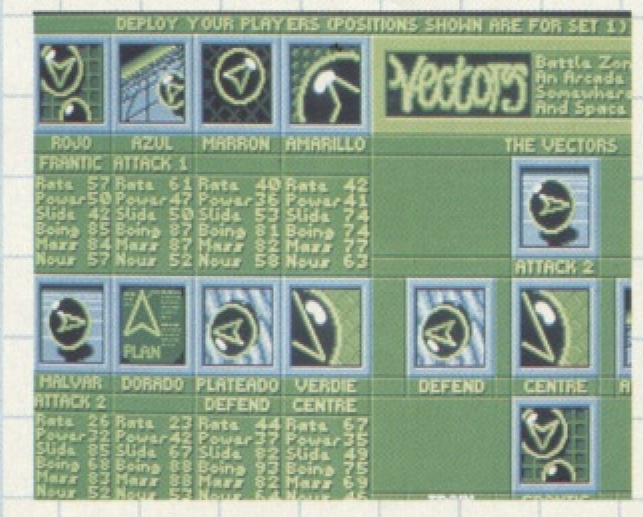
Marc had already tested out some of these ideas on Odin's 8-bit Hypa-Ball, but wanted to improve on them: "Hypa-Ball was exactly like all those other games which allow you to set loads of parameters for your team – they didn't actually make any difference. We wanted to produce a game where they did." It's not the only way in which Tribal differs from other games of its ilk: each match is played by three teams, not two, and unlike your ordinary common or garden table-top romp, the pitch is cross-shaped.

This unusual playfield comprises five different game arenas linked together by short inter-sector tunnels. The centre zone is neutral, and each team defends one of the other squares (there's a goal in each). The square at the base of the cross is the frantic zone where the action really hots up: it contains three goals, one for each team, so everybody has as much chance of scoring as of being scored against.

Technically, Eldritch has a fairly humble setup: a 1040 ST with a 20Mb hard drive each: "We've considered other ways, but decided it was easier just to code it on the ST straight away." Unusually, Tribal's first hesitant steps were actually in BASIC. Running around with a sphere sticking to your foot just wasn't their kind of ball-game, so milestone number one involved getting the maths for the collision between spheres exactly right. "We had a little window with the ball bouncing around it to get all the calculations right. It was easier to work it out in

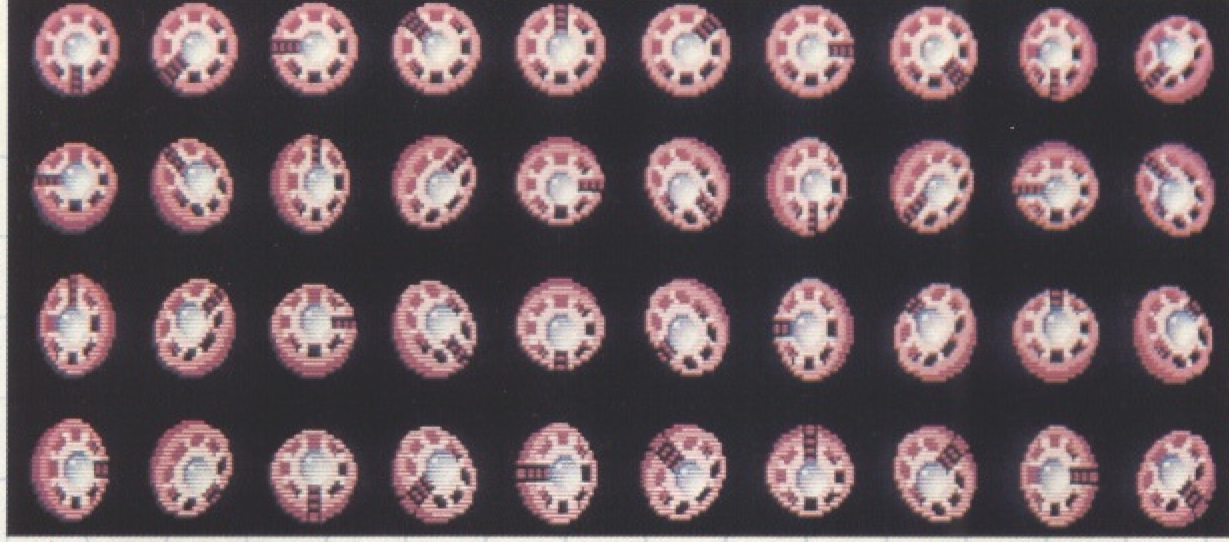
Among Tribal's wealth of handy features there's the chance to customise the gameplay according to your mood and the capabilities of your machine. Game settings allow you to turn off non-essential graphics which, on 520 STs and non-upgraded Amigas, need to be grabbed off the disk – thus slowing the action. It's up to you whether you go for frills or speed. Turning the players' intelligence off works as an interesting practice option in solo or two-player mode. The computer team just stands still while the flesh and blood teams get used to bashing the ball about. After the bully-off each match lasts between five and seven Snords (minutes) and is divided into three sets. At the moment, on an STE, all three players can use a joystick, on an Amiga or an ST someone will have to use keys: compatibility with available four-player adaptors is still something Eldritch is looking into. The conditions of a team's pitch affect its characteristics. The Manic Moose, spoiled by their icy pitch, are sluggish when playing away, while the Jello Juggernauts, are especially well-equipped in the bounce department. The Devils, on the other hand, are just strong – period.

Each team of five (one player for each pitch section) is picked from a squad of eight players. Individuals' skills are represented by five different characteristics: Rata (speed), Power (how hard a ball is hit), Slide (anti-friction factor), Boing (bounce factor) and Mass (weight). Nous (intelligence) is only relevant to a non-human team – real Tryballers provide their own. Each skill's value depends on the pitch. A heavy player with a hefty slide ratio on an icy pitch would be as easy to control as a ball-bearing on a sheet of glass.





Training costs – and not only in sweat. You can buy up to 25 per cent less injury per player and alter a characteristic by up to 10 per cent each way. Plus values aren't necessarily superior: on a jelly pitch for example, it pays to reduce a player's bounce. During development, it soon became clear that a maximum quota of purchasable skills per team was essential: without it, infinitely adjustable players were known to bounce right off the pitch and into the status panel.

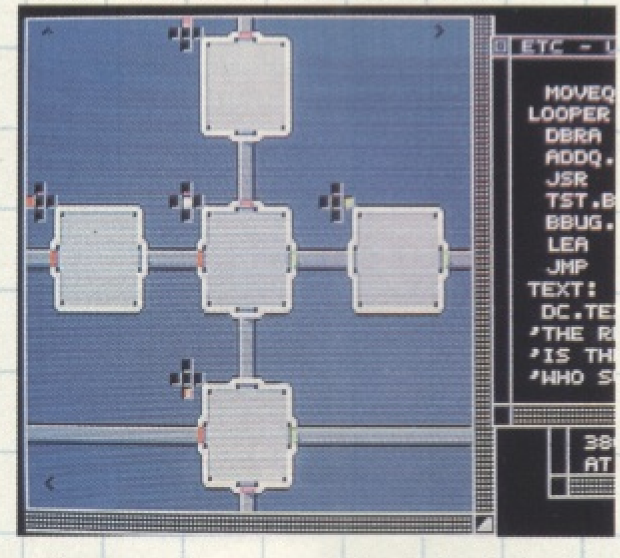


Each team icon, such as this one, comes complete with 40 frames of animation – 320 frames for the whole game. That's because on the pitch, player discs don't just move in eight different directions – each one tilts to five additional angles as it moves around the pitch.



When the going gets tough, the tough pick up bonuses. These come in two different shapes: Triangular (which affect the individual player only) or Square (which affect the whole pitch). Effects cover anything from a chip shot which allows you to lob the ball over everybody else's head, through increased slides, cash and free kicks to automatic teleports into the frantic zone.

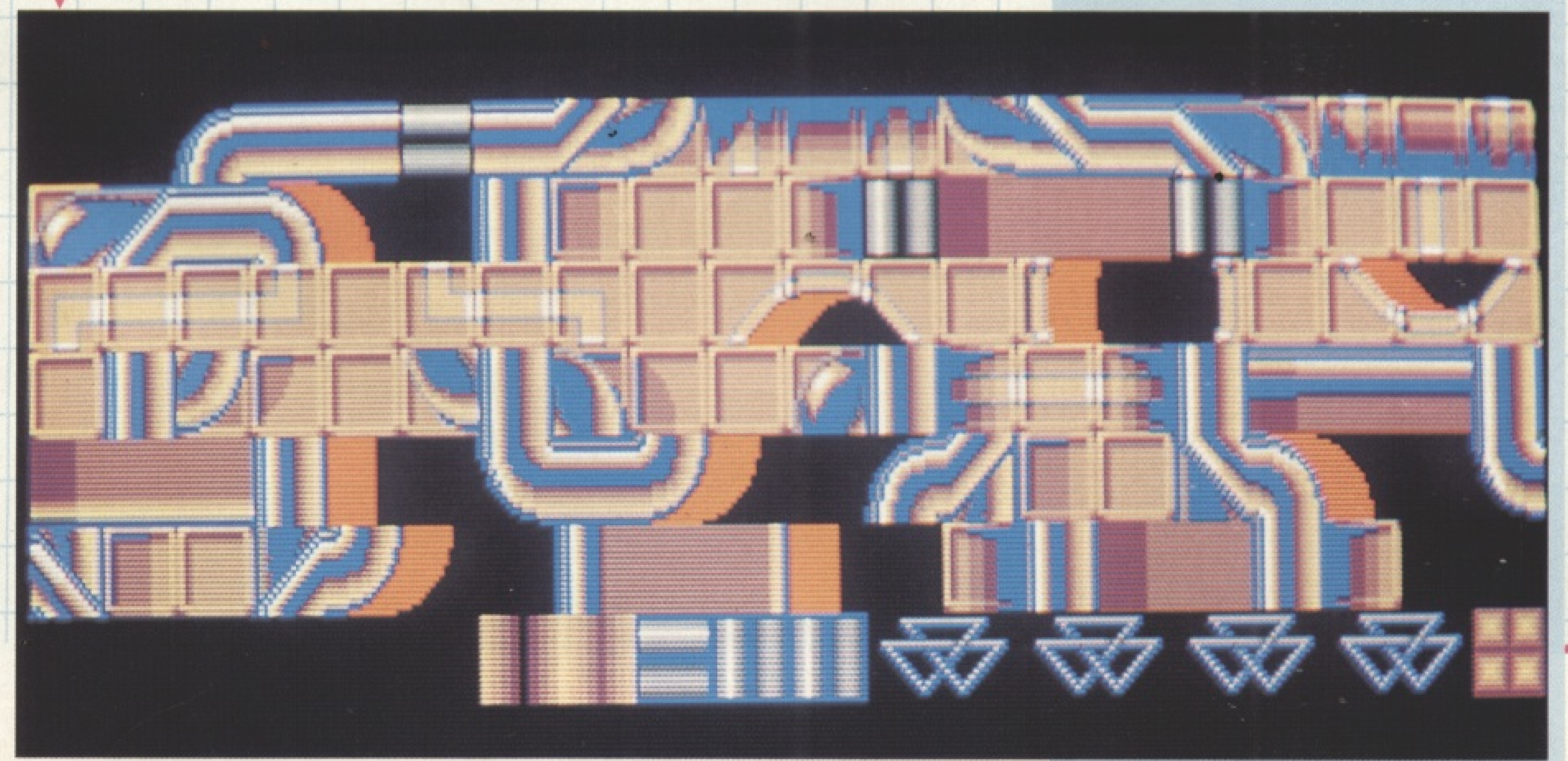
When Tribal was still a two-player game, the pitch was a much more conventional elongated rectangular shape. For the three-player version they suggested and rejected a number of designs, including a triangle and a version with goals looping into each other, before plumping for this one. After that it was all down to adjusting the details – goal and tunnel sizes, graphics, parallax and so on.



Faced with 64 team members to christen, Marc and Steve drew on various sources of wacky inspiration. The Uzteks, pictured here in their raw Art Studio form, are a tribute to Yorkshire expressions like Munt (mustn't), Whoshi (was she?), Whatta (water) and Mi-Sen (myself).



Pitches are built up from a selection of blocks designed in a combination of Art Studio, DPaint and Degas Elite. At this stage they're exclusive of the parallax effect and shadow algorithms, so for red read shadow and for blue read ordinary black.



BASIC first and then transfer it into code."

The other major initial factor was the scrolling. It's extraordinarily smooth for an ST and features a variety of complex and elaborate parallax and shadow effects. Combining the background with the spheres was a huge undertaking. "The maths was horrendous. We had to get the players colliding properly and the pitch used to look pretty bizarre with lines all over the place indicating where things were going to go." All Tribal's physical laws are mathematically accurate: "The friction is real friction and the ball isn't restricted to eight angles of bounce – it's a scaled value."

As for the players' artificial intelligence, keeping them stupid was a lot harder than making them smart. The artificial intelligence actually works out where the ball is going to be for the next 128 cycles. A computer player works out the ball's position, checks out the chances of hitting it, then predicts where it's going to go.

All the teams started out perfect and had to be downgraded. And apparently each team's degree of fallibility was difficult to gauge: "What appears slow and horrible when you're looking at it can actually be about right when you're playing." The artificial intelligence adds up to a large chunk of the 1,000K of data they've managed, by virtue of various DIY compression routines, to squeeze onto one disk.

It's currently still in the process of being tweaked but one thing's for sure – the computer teams are unlikely to become the victims of a walkover as they're designed to get smarter when they're behind. Sounds almost purrfect!

SOUND

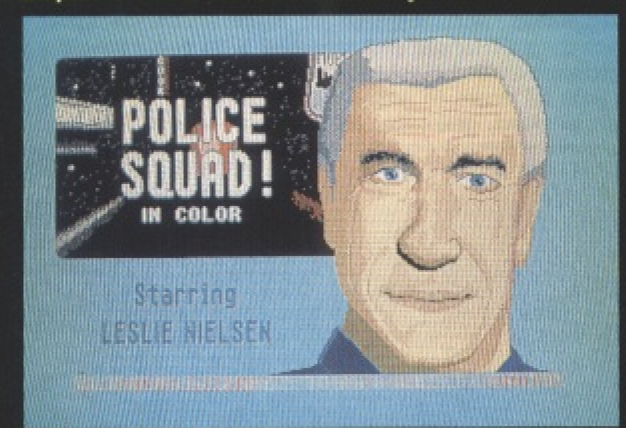
Tribal features eight different sampled tunes put together using the Quartet driver from Microdeal. Together, they span a wide selection of different musical styles – everything from Acid House to Stock, Aitken and Wetherill – and amount to about 300K of data. Amiga owners will have the option of playing music throughout a match, while ST owners will have to make do with music at the front end (and as the sounds have been relegated to the disk's B-side, those with a single-sided drive will have to do without even this).

DEMOS

Once again it's time to dip a toe into the domain they call 'public' to bring you the pick of what's new in the world of free art and animation. And if you are involved in compiling this fast growing stockpile of complimentary code, but as yet haven't merited a place in The One's hall of fame, it's probably only because we've yet to see your work. Interested? Then send your work to: DEMOS, The One, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU. As we've said before, we can't guarantee to return your wares unless you send them with a stamped addressed jiffy bag. Okay... let's boogie.



▲Spills'n'thrills with AGAtron's ray-traced Coke can.



▲A bullet spoof racket.





▲ Oozing Treks appeal.





▲RoboCop struts his rusty stuff in Islander's mini-movie.

It's been a bumper bouncing month for ST demos, with a strong field led by a swashbuckling RoboCop demo/movie by 'Islander'. This is a two disk (1Mb only), remix of almost the entire film, with the screen divided into quarters and brief slideshows/animations telling the story in samples and music. It's a quality slice of coding and editing, and if we gave prizes for the best demo of the month, this would get it without too much effort. A cop with a lot less mettle features in the Police Squad demo by 'Skunk' and 'Cookie Monster', which predictably enough features a picture (Sergeant Frank Drebin, Detective Lieutenant Police Squad – hand-drawn rather than digitized), accompanied by a long sample of the Police Squad theme. The tune is great, as ever, but the visuals are a touch cheap and cheerful. By the way, aren't these sampled tunes infringing copyright? Anyway, onward to the next delight. The Dragon's Lair demo is by an Israeli team of coders called Checkmate. Featuring a miniature screen with digitised animations of Dragon's Lair, this demo also depicts a robot dropping letters for the scrolling message (each letter has a pair of arms and legs and proceeds to walk across the screen). While all this is happening, there's a pleasant tune unfolding in the background. There's lots going on, and the scrolling message is quite funny – but you'll have to be prepared to give up the best part of your youth if you want to read it all. Almost as time-consuming is The Union Intro Compilation, a two-disk set containing 28 coding team intros. They're all pretty straightforward: sprite letters sine-waving about the place, scrolling messages doing their respective things, and the odd flash of polychromatic migraine bars flouncing up and down at the back. Terrific value for people who like intros, but who'd admit to that anyhow? For those who like to check out the opposition, Megashow 512 is a sort of slideshow of digitised and ray-traced pictures from the Amiga, PC and Apple Macintosh. Very picturesque, but some of them look a bit gritty on the ST resolution. From antique art to a warning to musicians: beware – Digisynth is not, as you'd expect, a sound program, but a smallish slideshow of title screens and digitised pictures by a group called Digisynth. Nice try fellas, but no banana. More predictably, Swedish New Year is – you guessed it – a celebration of the Swedish new year, which, by some twist of fate, happens to be the same as everyone else's! It's nothing stunning really, just an intro screen with a scrolling message, but what is good is that the other demo on the disk features the biggest 'wrap the message on the ball' type demo we've ever seen. Better still is the Star Trek Demo reel, by The Medway Boys. This fun-packed disk contains a menu screen featuring a bleep-lightful rendition of the evocative theme, two 1Mb animations from Star Trek III, and a slideshow from the other films. On the unusually quiet Amiga front, there's another disk by D-Mob, featuring a rather saucy picture combined with the ubiquitous scrolling message and a very high quality tune. Finally, there's the usual Star Trek demo from Tobias Richter – the man is still fanatically indulging his obsession, but this time he's added a small twist. These pictures were created by use of an unreleased ray-tracing program called Reflections, which judging from these pictures is a very good piece of kit indeed.

ROLL UP! ROLL UP!

ST

The Union Intro Compilation, Digisynth and Police Squad are available from Riverdene PDL, 63 Winteringham Way, Purley On Thames, Reading, Berks. RG8 8BH. Tel: (0734) 428492. The RoboCop Demo and Swedish New Year (buy early for next year) are from MPH, 10 Chandlers Court, Eaton, Norwich NR4 6EY. Tel: (0603) 503382. The Dragon's Lair demo is available from The Other PD Library, 108 Kenmare Road, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 3HQ.

AMIGA

Tobias Richter's ray traced Star Trek pictures are available (amongst other places) from Newsflash disk magazine, at Newsflash UK, 25 Fairfield Mount, Ossett, West Yorks. Tel: (0924) 265593. The new D-Mob demo is available from Riverdene PDL, 63 Winteringham Way, Purley On Thames, Reading, Berks. RG8 8BH. Tel: (0734) 428492.

PC

Once again – nothing. What is it with you guys? Have you nothing to show us? Or are you just plain bashful?

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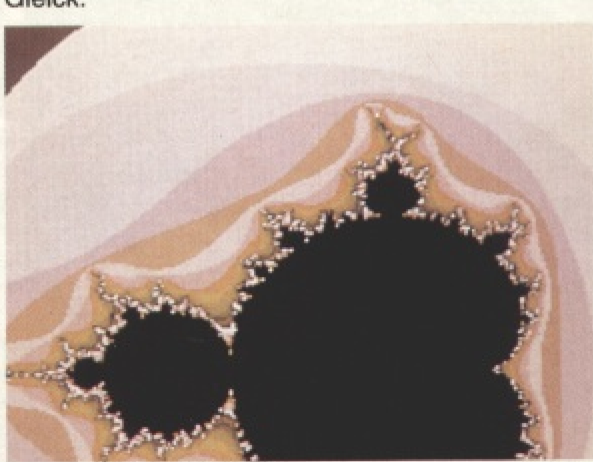


Phil South causes Chaos with Fractals.

There's nothing new about Fractals, and yet recently the subject seems to have become hot news. More so the Chaos theory – based on Fractal maths and the basis of a lot of Very High End Graphics. If you saw that short series of programs on BBC2 called Computer Dreams, you'd have seen that Fractals are used to create landscapes, leaves, trees – in fact any natural phenomenon can be reproduced, if you know the trick.

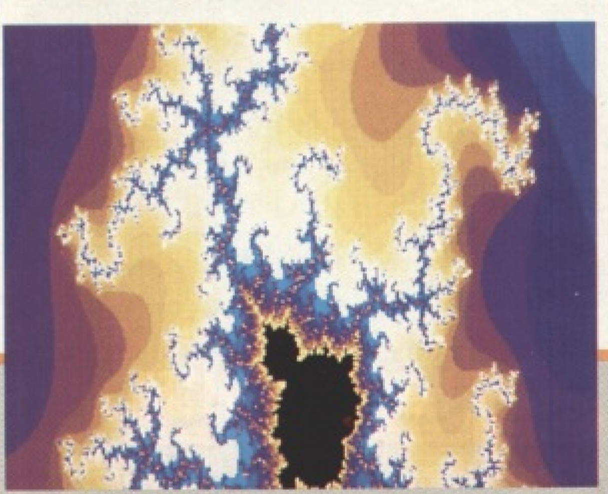
In recent times there have been more and more Fractal programs in the public domain on the ST, PC and Amiga, and at the European Computer Trade Show at the beginning of April this year, MicroIllusions was showing off a commercial program for the first time. This swish software allows the user to create landscapes and move them around, creating animated films of skimming the surface. Whether or not there are any practical applications of this program remains to be seen, but the reason Fractals and Chaos continue to surprise and baffle us is because (get this) they can be fun. They generate something attractive and we can't explain why they do it. Check out your local PD library for details of Fractal programs for your computer.

For more information on Fractals and connected matters, try The Fractal Geometry Of Nature by Benoit B Mandelbrot, The Science Of Fractal Images by Peitgen and Saupe or Chaos by James Gleick.



This Mandelbrot was made on the Atari ST using a program for the ST called MANDLE.PRG by John Kelk. Unlike a lot of Fractal programs, MANDLE is actually very fast, and this zoomed area of a larger picture only took about a minute. The algorithm is very fast, and a lot of other turbo-driven programs exist.

The most fundamentally intriguing aspect of Fractal Geometry is the Mandelbrot Set, named after the man who coined the word Fractal, Benoit B Mandelbrot. The Mandelbrot curves are brain-smackingly complex, and feature 'self-similarity on all scales'. In English this means if you magnify a section up, it bears an uncanny resemblance to the original view – just like the trunk of a tree splitting into similar boughs, which in turn split into similar branches and then twigs. This example was made on the Amiga in 32 colours and hi-res using Tom Wilcox's Mandelbrot Explorer Disk (Fish disk 21).





You can create very realistic landscapes on the Amiga using a program called Scenery by Brett Casebolt (Fish disk 155). The reason the shading on the triangular faces looks so smooth is that each scene is rendered in 32 colours. The light sources can be positioned to left, right, front or back of the object to give the correct amount of shading. And you can also specify the height of the water.



MicroIllusions Fractal Machine will be out soon on the Amiga, allowing you to create and display stunning 3D landscapes like this one. Each triangular face is constructed through a series of calculations which determine how high it is, what angle it is to the ground, and where it is in relation to the light source. This information is rendered as a picture, given the type of 'lens' you are using in your 'camera'. You then move the camera to create another picture. Make a series of pictures and you have an amazing Fractal Movie!

PIXEL PATTER

You may remember Simon Hunter from when we did a piece on Palace Software's Dragon's Breath? Well now the stress of all that is out of the way, he's back to his regular jobs of producing computer graphics for Bullfrog and drawing the Blockheads strip for Deadline magazine. So why a second chat?

Simple. Simon used Fractal generators for the terrain in Dragon's Breath.

"Yes I did – using Scenery."

What exactly did you use it for?

"When you use the program it's not very specific. What I do is I cut out any appropriate bits and retouch them together."

Make a little jigsaw out of them...

"Yeah, it was never just one screen. I just chose all the best bits from loads of pictures. The problem is that sometimes it does something interesting then builds a big wall in front of it. That was the problem, you have to sometimes do things twice, because you'd get two good bits in the same picture, but one was covering up the other."

But what makes a talented artist like yourself resort to using a program to do the work?

"Originally I was going to simply draw the rocks. But then I saw this program and tried it out, and I thought the pictures looked really good. So why not take advantage of it?"

This is true. So how's the Blockheads series going in Deadline?

"I'm doing 12 of them in all. I may have other stuff in other magazines, but that's all up in the air. We've had three Blockheads printed, and I'm in the middle of the fourth one now. I don't know when they'll actually be out, unfortunately. Just have to see what happens."

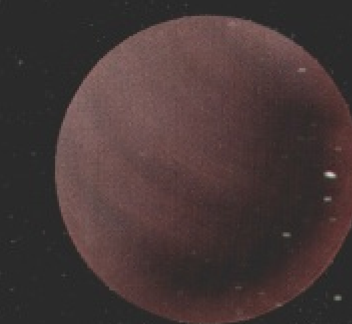
The reason I asked is: will you be using your Amiga work in any comics in future? Dave Gibbons wants to use his for drawing rooms in CAD packages so you can look at them from all angles.

"That's a very good idea, isn't it. That would be really useful, I don't think I'd need to use it for anything else. On faces and bodies I don't think the computer can help you. I don't know what it is with computer generated comics. People get too carried away with using the computer. But it destroys any artistic merit. I'm interested in using computers for things like... in my comics, full page pictures done on an Amiga, to show the computer's viewpoint. I don't know if anything will ever appear of that, I might be using my Amiga WITH my comic work, but not my Amiga and nothing else! It's just another tool."

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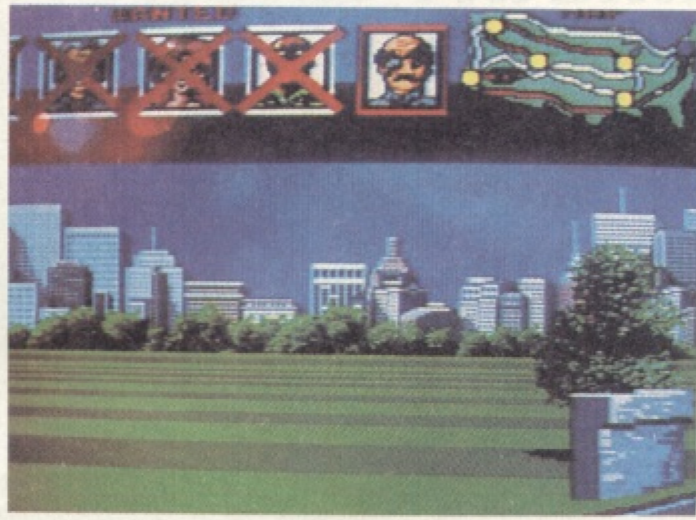
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What have a ten pence piece, Brian Nesbitt and a rabbit-shaped rubber jelly mould got in common? Well the first two are responsible for this month's column... Unfortunately we can't talk about the third as the case has yet to come to court.







THIRD PARTY FIRE & THEFT

In an attempt to provide alternatives to favourite themes – shoot 'em up, beat 'em up etc – there have been many enhancements made over the years. The race game has fared particularly well in this respect: not only have we seen the addition of chase and erase scenarios – the viewpoint has also progressed from plan view to second-person perspective and even to a three-screen wide display.

Tatsumi, which was one of the first to introduce triple-screeners with **TX-1** and **Buggy Boy**, now adds to its collection with **Round Up 5**, which combines both gameplay and display progressions.

RU5 is very much in the same mould as Taito's **Chase HQ**, seeing you sat in a Ferrari F-40-alike (Chase HQ featured a Porsche-alike), chasing after vehicle-bound criminals and bumping or blasting them off the road. There are five criminals, whose images are shown at the top of the left-hand screen and crossed out when captured.

Apart from than the two extra screens, Round Up 5 doesn't offer anything new – it's tough and fun, but only really for the reminiscents.

Round Up 5's extra screens serve to generate a healthy impression of speed, but they don't really improve the tired and rusted gameplay.

HELL ON WHEELS

The scenario to Atari Games' **Badlands** reads: "It's been 50 years since the nuclear disaster. The sport of sprint racing is now a ruthless battle between armed cars. These races take place on tracks built in the ruins of the dangerous nuclear zone known only as the BADLANDS."

But behind this post-holocaust nightmare, this is basically a souped-up version of that ageing Atari Games racing favourite **Super Sprint**. The gameplay is simple: speed around eight different single-screen track layouts, which change with the level of difficulty – but finishing first isn't so easy.

Apart from the now-standard turbo-charge and 'tires', available upgrades include missiles and shields. Badlands doesn't offer anything radically new, but this is no bad thing as the playability's so high. It's definitely worthy of conversion to home computer, despite the fact that it will lose some of its feel without the pedal and steering wheel.

Domark is the likeliest contender to pick up its licence, but it has yet to confirm it will do so.





▲Falling power lines and a water tower are part and parcel of the hustle and bustle of City life.



▲Oil spills and thrills in the Refinery.

ARCADE NEWS

FEUD FOR THOUGHT

Concentrating on something that US Gold actually IS converting, the firm's latest CapCom licence – **Dynasty Wars**, the multi-level beat 'em up set in Feudal Japan – is due for release in July, and the ST version in particular (which is being written by **Tiertex**'s John Prince, the man behind Strider) is looking particularly close to the original.

US Gold's forthcoming Dynasty Wars. Blake's just found out that he's the father of Craig, who's married his own sister...



BUG HUNT

Audiogenic, which is perhaps better known for licensing sports personalities, has just snapped up its first coin-op licence – Gottlieb's **Exterminator**, which sees you in control of a pair of free-roaming laser-spitting hands with the task of ridding a house of troublesome insects. No-one has been signed up to convert it as yet, and a release date has yet to be set – needless to say there'll be a bit of a wait before there's anything to see.

OOPS!

Last month we mentioned that US Gold had snapped up the rights to Data East's **Midnight Resistance** and that Arc Developments, the company behind the conversions of Forgotten Worlds and Crack Down was already beavering away on it. Not true. The fact of the matter is that **Ocean** has the licence, and **Special FX** (The team behind Batman: The Caped Crusader and The Untouchables) is working on the conversions even as we speak. With any luck we'll see something by Summer.

TRIO-MENDOUS

Following last month's shock revelation that Elite is back in the arcade licensing game after a two-year absence, it's been announced that the Walsall-based firm has just picked up not one, but THREE Sega coin-ops!

The titles are a beat 'em up, **Last Battle**, and two sports simulations, **World Championship Soccer** and **Tournament Golf**. But don't expect to see anything straight away – none of the titles are expected to appear until at least October!

Three to see over the coming year courtesy of Elite. Last Battle, World Championship Soccer and Tournament Golf.



FIGHTING TALK

Ocean also has the licence to Data East's multi-level killing spree **Sly Spy Secret Agent** (with conversion work in the capable hands of **Software Creations**) and Tecmo's Ninja beat 'em up, **Shadow Warriors** (this one trusted to **Teque Software**). Both are expected to appear by the end of May.

NOT DRAGON ITS HEELS

And talking of **Arc Developments** (which we just were, in a roundabout sort of way), the team is currently working on the 16-bit conversions of Irem's **Dragon Breed** for Activision. All things being equal, these will also surface before the end of the year...

GEO-WHIZZ!

SNK, Japanese purveyors of such coin-op classics as **The Ikari Warriors**, and, more recently, the three-player shoot 'em-up **Beast Busters**, has plans to release its revolutionary new console, the Neo Geo, in this country at September's European Computer Entertainment Show at Earl's Court. While information on the system is still scarce, it's understood that the console games will be identical to their coin-op counterparts – for the simple reason that the console and the arcade machine use the same cartridges! Roll on September...

PROSE'S PRIMARY LAUNCH



MicroProse Games' F-15 Strike Eagle in action. And if you think this still looks pretty tasty, wait till you see it move! Ooowwww-eeeee!

With more experience of flying under its belt that Biggles and Chuck Yeager put together, simulation king MicroProse is preparing to make its first bold step into the arcades – with an enhanced version of one of its oldest games. **F-15 Strike Eagle** (first released on the Commodore 64 way back in 1985) has been beefed up beyond all recognition and tweaked to incorporate a more immediate, 'arcadey' style of gameplay.

In fact the only similarities between this and the 8-bit original are the plane that you fly and the fact that both games used polygons – but the coin-op promises 3D graphics the like of which have never been seen before, both in terms of detail and sheer speed. How does 60,000 polygons updating at 30 frames every second sound for starters?



Even F-15 Strike Eagle's cabinet looks like the real thing! What other coin-ops can you think of that have Rescue hatches and fuel caps?

In gameplay terms, everything has been simplified: the missions are now more action-based, while extra weapons and fuel are collected simply by knocking out the correct targets. That said, not all traces of authenticity have been lost – check out the realistic flight joystick on the cabinet and the in-game HUD display.

F-15 Strike Eagle was announced by MicroProse at Chicago's American Coin Machine Expo (ACME) show in March, and is expected to go on release in US arcades in June – unfortunately you'll have to wait until Autumn to test it out for yourself. After that, MicroProse Games (the company's newly-created arcade division) has plans for even more coin-operated wares, some of which to be based, once again, on existing simulation software. Toodle pip...

Out in the middle of the Gulf, with a Bogey in your sights – just one touch of the missile trigger and he's history...



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I LINK—THEREFORE I AM

Always concerned with your social life, Phil South brings a you a step-by-step guide to the art of interfacing.

What is a datalink game? Well you may have one already and not know it. Basically, datalinking is a facility within a program which allows two players to compete on separate computers by using a cable. There are many different ways and reasons for adding this feature, but basically any two-player scenario can be enhanced by the addition of real players: in fact, this concept has been used for years to very good effect in Multi-User Games such as Micronet's Shades or the infamous MUD.

The most famous games which use a datalink include SubLogic's Flight Simulations II, III and Jet. These flight simulations use the datalink to allow two players to fly simultaneously in the same airspace. Apart from anything else, SubLogic was one of the first software houses to use this technique in a popular game.

Californian publisher Microillusions, better known for its deeply serious music and video programs, has also produced 'one to one' games with a datalink connection – but the games, Firepower and Galactic Invasion to name two, are more fun when used with a modem link. This is a more prevalent idea in the States, where local calls are free and you can stay on the phone all night if you like – such games are a little more expensive to use in the UK.

Mirrorsoft (through its American affiliate, Spectrum HoloByte) has Falcon, Tank, A-10 Warthog and Flight Of The Intruder either already released or in production, all of which feature datalink capability. The neat thing about Tank and the forthcoming A-10 Warthog is that two players can link the two games and play two tanks, two aircraft or even one tank and one aircraft simultaneously! This will be the first time you'll actually be able to link two separate products like this, and bodes well for the future of datalink gaming.

Electronic Arts is also committed to datalinking, with two products, Powerdrome and Bullfrog's Populous, already featuring the link (also, all future Bullfrog products are due to carry the link). However, there is a small problem with Populous: it's a good idea to play with the same version in each machine. Early versions differ slightly from later versions – try using the two in tandem and you are shown the message: 'Incompatible landscape error on two player serial game. Switching back to one player game in pause', before being dropped into a standard one-player scenario. So check your versions.

Surprisingly, MicroProse has no datalink flight simulators, but it does include the feature in Stunt Car Racer and RVF Honda. Stunt Car is one of the best examples of the difference a human opponent makes. For a start you have a more equal chance to win, as the human you play probably only possesses as much skill as you do. Apart from that, you can't beat having some chums round and playing a tournament for sheer entertainment – and beating a live human is much more satisfying than outwitting the computer's preprogrammed responses.

By the way, one way in which datalink gaming has made a big impression in recent times is through the emergence of handheld consoles – specifically Nintendo's GameBoy. Using the link cable which comes with the unit, you can play most of its games in two-player mode with another GameBoy owner. The favourite in the office at the moment is Tetris, which works by giving your opponent any lines of blocks you get rid of. As yet there are no games for the Atari Lynx that use the ComLynx, but the socket is there for when they're eventually developed.

Thanks to Neil Davey and Paul Andrews for their help in researching this article.

DO IT YOURSELF

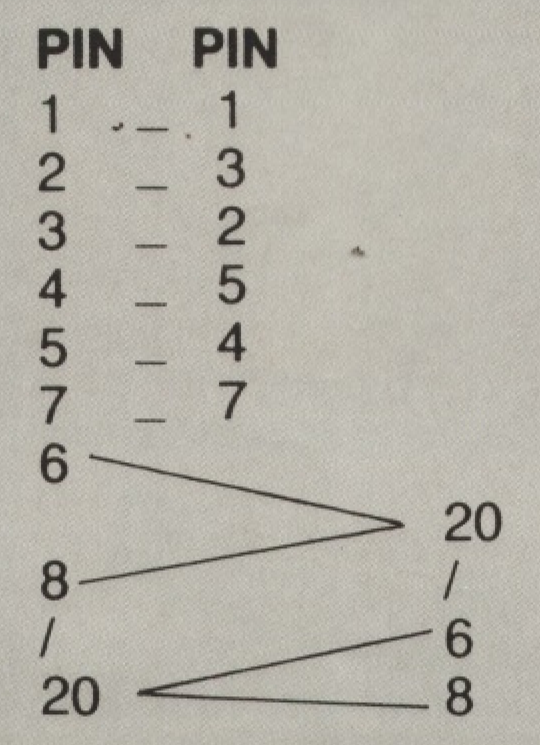
Okay, so you already have the software to run and the friend to link with, so how do you go about getting your two machines to talk to each other? It's really quite simple, and to prove it here are the wiring diagrams.

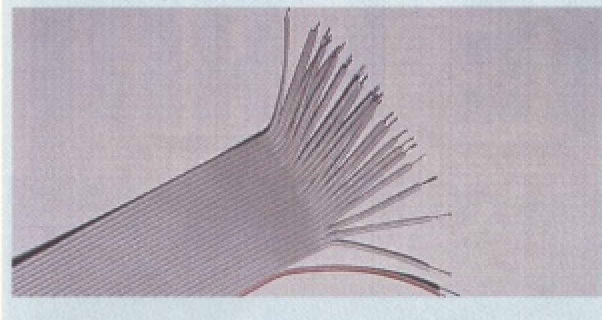
The basic Null Modem lead is good for all normal datalink games. And although you can get away with connecting less pins then we're going to, it's best to cover all the options in case programmers start using any trick protocols.

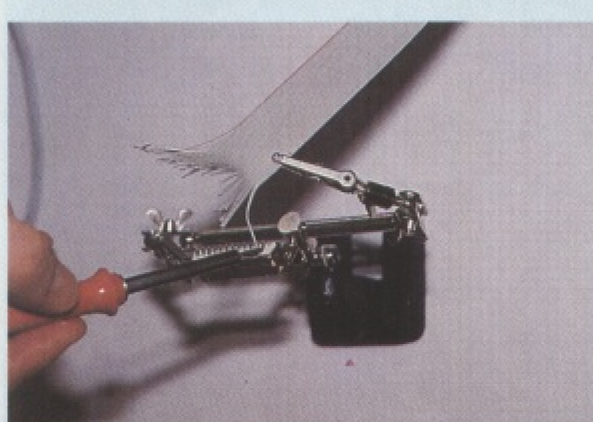
What you need is a length of multicore cable (with at least 15-25 wires) and a pair of good old 25-pin 'D' connectors and covers. A screwdriver to fit the covers would be a good idea – oh yes, and you might have problems soldering the wires if you don't have a soldering iron and some solder (if you've never soldered anything before then consult the panel entitled Soldering On). Important note: notice that both wires 6 and 8 are fastened to pin 20 in both directions.

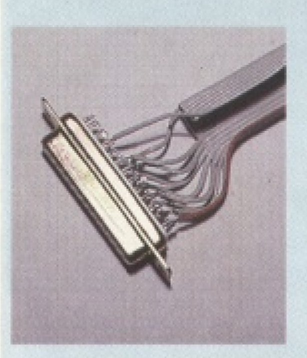
The different wiring schemes for RVF Honda are due to the fact that it apparently needs faster communication between the computers, so they hook the cable up to the parallel port instead of the serial port. The only difference in the parts list is the plugs must be the right sex. Check your parallel port and see if it's male or female. For example, early Amiga parallel ports were male, but later ones are female (in case you don't know the difference for sure, the male is the one with the pins poking out, and the female is the one with the holes – vive la difference!).

Your Basic Null Modem Lead











SOLDERING ON

A Quickstart Guide To Soldering Wires And Stuff

Making the lead is a piece of cake for anyone who has any experience of soldering, but if you've never touched a soldering iron in your life, perhaps we ought to give you some ideas on how to proceed.

To start with, soldering irons are hot. So be cool. By all means buy a small cheap soldering iron, but you'll probably have to extend the flex as they're invariably too short. Secondly (and this may seem obvious) you need some kind of rest for the iron while it's hot. If the lead is too short it might pull the iron off the stand, so the lead must be long AND the stand you choose must be stable. Otherwise something – either you or the furniture – is going to get burned.

One thing you might find useful here is a Helping Hand: a contraption which is like a magnifying glass on a stand with a pair of crocodile clips attached. This allows you to hold the plug, wire and iron all at the same time without having to grow an extra arm. It also means that when you apply the iron to the wire you won't burn your finger(s).

Okay, you really are ready now. Strip the wires you intend to solder and twist the ends. Melt a spot of solder onto the iron and then dab it on the end of the wire. This seals the end of the wire and makes it fit more easily into the plug. Then simply pop the wire end into the correctly numbered hole, melt another spot of solder onto the iron and stroke it over the wire and hole, sealing the two together. Be careful not to pause on the hole for too long though, or you could end up melting it.

INTERFACE TO FACE

This Month: A Chat With Bullfrog's Kevin Donkin



Populous is awesome in one-player mode, but takes on a whole new dimension when played against human opposition. So, going right to the top we quizzed programmer Kevin Donkin about the important little places of datalinking.

Firstly Kevin, can you briefly explain how datalinking is achieved?

"What you have is a game that potentially has two players, and you could do it by having two joysticks. But what we do is for Player One we use the joystick port. For Player Two what you do is instead of telling the computer to read the joystick, you get your information from the serial port, in the form of the other player's joystick movement. So you do the same thing on both machines, and you pass the joystick movements between the two. So that they both then do exactly the same thing. Like in Populous every time your opponent raises a block, you just pass that raise block instruction to the other machine to tell it to do so. It means that when you've got a game and things are happening randomly, then you can't actually use real random numbers. You've got to use a random numbers sequence that returns the same result on both machines, otherwise they would get out of step and things would start to look different. And basically speaking that's all there is to it. If you've got a really complex game where you've got more things happening, you need to pass a lot more data, which is what you want to try to avoid."

Is there a limit to the amount of data you can pass between machines?

"Yes, there is. Say you're using the serial port at 300 baud, that's bits per second, which is what? Thirty-five bytes every second! If you've got to pass 35 bytes it means your game turn is going to be very slow. So if you're doing it with a shoot 'em up it would look bloody awful. So the smaller amount of stuff you pass the better. Which is why some games actually only work on a datalink, as opposed to over a modem, generally because they set the serial port at 9600 baud or something."

Could you do a game with more than one other player?

"You can get boards for an Amiga now, where you could have 15 serial ports in a 2000. Then everyone would be talking to that one machine, and it would just pass the information out to the others. So that is easily possible."

But not as a popular game, because you'd have to sell them the board as well?

"That's right. But the cards are only about 100. What you can also do is use MIDI, which is after all just like a serial port. There was a game on MIDI a long time ago, called MIDI Maze."

A 16-player game on the Atari ST – yes that was good fun. Can you do that on the Amiga or PC?

"Yeah, if you've got a MIDI port. You need the little adaptor for the Amiga, but then that's only about 15 now. But although it's a very fast protocol, the problem there is that you're not talking to any one person. The thing is that once you're talking to up to 16 people, you've still got to put the same information down 16 times, as it were. Things can be done on MIDI, of course you can't use the phone then. But then again it's also possible to have a game where it says: 'Okay, what do you want to do: use the modem, use the serial port, or use the MIDI'"



WHERE TO GET THE BITS

You can buy all the bits you need from your local Tandy store, of which there are millions countrywide. This is convenient but a bit expensive. A better option is to get the bits by mail order from Maplin Electronics, or a similar electronics wholesaler. Get their catalogue from your newsagent or call into one of their stores in London (01 748 0926), Birmingham (021 384 8411), Bristol (0272 232014), Leeds (0532 449200), Manchester (061 236 0281), Newcastle Upon Tyne (091 224 0990), Nottingham (0602 410242), Reading (0734 566638), Southampton (0703 225831) or Southend (0702 554000).

The parts you need should only cost you about £6.69. These are (complete with Maplin part numbers): two female 25-way D sockets, number YQ49D (£1.20 each); two metres of multi-core cable, number XR46A for the 25-way (£1.28 per metre), or if you want to save a few pence then take the 15-way cable, number XR28F (86p per metre) – and two covers for the connectors, number FP29G (86p each).

If you don't want to burn yourself to death using the soldering iron, then you can buy a ready-made null modem lead from Lightwave (051 639 5050) part number MCL-197 for £10.95 (plus £1 p&p). Or if you've got a normal modem cable you can convert it with the Null Modem adapter from Maplins, part number YP85G.

Although the multicore cable is probably best suited to the job, it can be replaced with a piece of ribbon cable, which is a flat strip containing the same amount of wires (see photos).


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THE ONE

THE EIGHTIES. A DECADE PART FIVE

Surprise surprise. It happened again – Gary Penn got cut off mid-letter. So, here's all of 'M', along with 'N' and some more fun letters besides. Could this really be the penultimate part?

MATTEL. The toy manufacturer was at one point sole UK distributor of the Nintendo console, but it also had its own fair share of the fun with the Intellivision console. Not to mention the Aquarius home computer, the age of which never really came. Ha ha.

MELBOURNE HOUSE. The Australian book-turned-software publisher gave us, thanks to Beam Software (which is now writing for consoles and employs the Dawn French of the programming world, Gary Liddon), Hungry Horace (polite PacMan-esque affair), Horace Goes Skiing (and didn't he just, in this mediocre downhill slalom), The Way Of The Exploding Fist (the first real home computer beat 'em up) and Fist II (a sadly flawed arcade adventure variation on the fighting theme). And what about the games creator HURG. And those classic text 'n' graphic adventures – The Hobbit and Sherlock. And the two novel 'strategy' games: Mugsy and Mugsy's Revenge. Ah yes, and the joystick-controlled adventure Zim Sala Bim, the comic-strip capers of Redhawk and (ho hum) The Lord Of The Rings. Melbourne House was acquired by Virgin Mastertronic and is now used to release such novelties as Road Wars, Xenon and War In Middle Earth. Melby's next Big Thing is a second attempt at a Judge Dredd game (at least it can't be any worse than the first).

MEMOTECH. From the company that produced all those nice peripherals came the hardest home computer ever. Wrapped in a tough, matt-black metal coat, DK Tronics' mean, lean, fightin' machine (and team of elite mercenary accessories for that matter) looked like Sigourney Weaver in her ExoSkeleton at the end of Aliens. The Memotech was supposedly capable of great things, but no-one was brave enough to get close enough to find out for sure.

MICROPOOL. One of those software publishers that only chucks out a couple of products before disappearing for good. Micropool's mammoth list of releases comprises the unusual but playable Nuclear Embargo, and Mission Elevator, a competent conversion of uninteresting coin-op.

MICRODEAL. This software publisher moved onto 16-bit when the machines were in their infancy with Time Bandits and Goldrunner for the ST. But who can remember the old Dragon days? In particular, the 'Bobby Davro' series of Cuthbert 'impressions' – like Cuthbert In The Jungle. Activision probably remembers the four-eyed housewives' choice and his jungle japes, for it was this game that infringed Activision's copyright of Pitfall and resulted in Cuthbert In The Jungle's removal from the scene. These days, Microdeal's leaving games publishing behind and concentrating on other leisure pursuits. The company was going to bow out gracefully with Goldrunner 3D, but a polite curtsy is the best it managed now that Ocean's got the product.

MICROGEN. Following Mad Martha, Pyjamarama (and the rest of the Wally Week saga) and Battle Of The Planets, Microgen floundered and eventually bit the dust thanks to its Shadow Of The Unicorn project with special hardware add-on.

MIRRORSOFT. What about Caesar The Cat, Go Sprite, Biggles, Raid 2000, Tetris (yay), and The Bermuda Project, eh? In an attempt to shake the corporate stiff 'n' starchy white-collar image, Mirrorsoft begat the Image Works label. It also plays mummy to four major labels: PSS, Spectrum HoloByte, Cinemaware, and FTL, who collectively have produced some of the all-time greats, including Rocket Ranger, It Came From The Desert, Falcon, Oids, and Dungeon Master.

MOLIMERX. AKA Digital Fantasia, producer of some of the earliest text adventures for the TRS80 (and others). Mysterious Adventure and Arrows Of Death number among the company's classics. Where the team is and what the boys are up to now is anyone's guess.

MOGUL. FireAnt is one of this publisher's most memorable releases, but it's probably best remembered for Murphy's Mine, which was more than a little similar to an Ocean game released at the time called Gilligan's Gold.

MONOLITH. From the loins of Beyond came Monolith, with its tacky Monolithic boxes housing such delights as Mike Singleton's much-hyped but sadly lacking Quake Minus One and First Star's excellent Boulderdash II.

MSX. The multi-media computer format of the next generation – or at least it was supposed to be back in the mid 80's. The idea was to create a computer utopia, where everybody produced computers that were compatible with each other. With support from companies like Sony, JVC and Sharp, it couldn't fail... but it did. After a brief glimmer of popularity, the MSX died an agonising death and was never heard from again – at least not over here. In Japan (where the machine was born), the MSX (along with its successor the MSX 2) is still immensely popular – a quick look at the top Oriental games magazine Login will confirm that.

NAMCO. Another Japanese coin-op manufacturer of repute. Responsible for what is probably the most well-known of all arcade games: PacMan. Not forgetting Ms PacMan (starring a female PacMan who has PacBabies in the intermission sequences!), Super PacMan (a beefed up version of the original), Baby PacMan (both a pinball machine and a video game), PacMan Jr, Pac-Land (converted to 16-bit courtesy of Grandslam) and the contemporary Pac-Mania (also converted to 16-bit courtesy of Grandslam – well, Teque). Namco's other major player was a game starring that spinach-guzzling sailor Popeye and his friends.

NEW CONCEPTS. After Surf Champ and its plastic surfboard keyboard overlay, New Concepts was keen to unleash more ideas of a similar nature – like sailing and skateboarding. However, its enthusiasm wasn't enough to stop the company from not getting any further than Surf Champ.

NEW GENERATION. These boys delivered the goods on more than one occasion. New Generation's forte was producing exceptionally innovative and highly playable software. Like the bizarre Knot In 3D, that classic Trashman (his Travels in the sequel weren't so hot, but that's excusable), Cliff Hanger (the only interactive cartoon which was truly both. Reminiscent of the Road Runner series, there were 50 screens of 'puzzles' to solve – ie: traps, and it was funny and brilliant), and the appropriately named Shoot The Rapids (a supremely playable kayaking simulation). Unfortunately, Jonah Barrington's Squash and Amazon Warrior let the side down towards the end of play. But where are they now?

NEXUS. Born of Beyond and Monolith. Nexus was Nexus' first release, but despite some very impressive promises it turned out to be more memorable for its packaging – a plastic silver 'lunchbox' which was more entertaining than the software. Further attempts to overwhelm the public included a sequel to Psy Warrior, which was good as it wasn't too dissimilar to the first (if not anywhere near as atmospheric).

NINTENDO. What can you say about this company that hasn't already been approved by them first. Its worldwide success has yet to reach these shores, but by jingo its console's done well. The FamiCom (FAMIly COMputer) took Japan and the States by storm, and its successor, the Super FamiCom, will no doubt do the same. The GameBoy on the other hand looks like achieving world-wide success. The company's also delivered the goods in the arcades with Donkey (supposed to be Monkey but something was lost in translation) Kong, which marked superstar Mario's debut, Donkey Kong Jr, Donkey Kong III & IV, Mario Bros, Super Mario Bros, and of course the PlayChoice 10 system.

NOVAGEN. The small but perfectly formed Birmingham-based outfit's quantity of releases isn't particularly extensive, but the quality is second to none. In his time, genius programmer Paul Woakes has given us the excellent Battlezone-inspired Encounter, the unique arcade adventure Mercenary (not forgetting the Second City), Backlash (a 16-bit Encounter-inspired shoot 'em up which was almost as great but not quite), and the (still) long-awaited sequel to Mercenary: Damocles (ever the perfectionist, Paul is still implementing new features, hence the delay). Novagen also released a couple of non-home-grown product, including the not-so-impressive HellBent.

OCEAN. Wet a success story! Sea water you can do with a little dedication. From the early days of Kong (guess what this was a version of...), Ocean's gone from strength to strength, Transversion (a Tron Lightcycles type game), Mr Wimpy (the company's first licence – an unofficial version of Burgertime starring the Wimpy burger chain's Mr Wimpy no less), Rollerball (mediocre attempt at Qix), Hunchback (Ocean's first real arcade conversion), Moon Alert (not too dissimilar to Atari's scrolling shoot 'em up Moon Patrol), Gilligan's Gold (just like Mogul's Murphy's Mine), Cavelon (similar to the ageing coin-op classic Tutankhamen, but starring a knight), Chinese Juggler (off-the-wall simulation concerning that age-old 'trick' of spinning plates on poles), Android II (the a-maze-ing shoot 'em up sequel to Vortex's Android), TLL (converted from Vortex's Spectrum original to the C64 by Simon 'Crazy Comets' Nicol), Frankie Goes To Hollywood (one of the first pop bands to be licensed for use in a computer game – and while it didn't actually feature those nice boys, there was plenty of music and Frankie-related material, courtesy of Denton Designs), Miami Vice (oh dear), Knight Rider (oh dear oh dear), Street Hawk (oh dear oh dear oh dear), It's A Knockout (oh dear oh dear oh dear oh dear), Head Over Heels (one of the best games ever), and a host of successful conversions of Konami coin-ops, including Yie Ar Kung Fu I & II, Ping Pong, Mikey, Green Beret, and Gryzor. On the 16-bit front

we've had ECO, Wizball, Platoon, Arkanoid, Arkanoid: Revenge Of Doh... hell, the list goes on and on and on.

PALACE. The film and video producer entered the software fray with a home computer version of its controversial sick flick Evil Dead (sadly, there wasn't a software sequel). Fortunately, Cauldron, Cauldron II, The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad, Barbarian and Barbarian II have more than made up for that dodgy debut. Having recently discarded its Outlaw label, Palace now distributes two slices of French fare – namely Delphine and Silmarils.

PARAMOUNT. This software publisher came and went with barely a ripple. However, there were a couple of slick pebbles in the water – like Outback (an 'Australian' version of the old arcade favourite PooYan) and an Asteroids-y affair, the name of which escapes me at the moment.

PC ENGINE. Got everyone excited by its size, graphics and sound, but a year on only a few people are equally as enthused. Yet to appear over here officially, but made its mark in the US of A as the Turbo Grafx. Now the hand-held system is causing a commotion among the cognoscenti. Who gives a toss. Without any decent playable games all this top hole technology don't amount to a hill o' beans.

PENN, GARY. The former tonsorial sculptor and editor of this organ likes almost everything and everyone in the whole world. His list of gear games includes Zarch/Virus, Leaderboard, Mercenary, Paradroid, The Sentinel, Nebulus, Populous, Robotron, Rocket Ranger, Ballblazer, StarGate, Kick Off, Mario Bros, Super Marios Bros I & II, The Eidolon, Tetris, Head Over Heels, Bubble Bobble, Rainbow Islands, Oids, Myriad, Jelly Monsters, and Tetris on the GameBoy – to name but 24.

PERSONAL COMPUTER GAMES. An entertaining alternative to EMAP's Computer & Video Games edited by Chris Anderson, who went on to launch ZZAP! 64 and eventually Future Publishing. PCG featured the first ever playable previews cassette, with a playable level of Boulderdash and previews including Interdisc's Black Knight (see BackSpace Issue 19).

PHANTOM KARATE DEVILS, ATTACK OF THE. Ha he ho. They don't make 'em like they used to, eh? What a great name. What a crap game. As you can probably guess, it's a beat 'em up. What you probably didn't guess it that it was on the Commodore 64, with backdrops made from the machine's built-in character set and a big geezer to control. However, his size meant that out of the 64's eight hardware sprites, there weren't very many remaining for the bad guys, which is why they weren't very frequent or very... good. Knives, arrows and best of all, a pair of floating goggles and hands were there to be beaten up. Oh yes, and the title sequence went on far too long and was full of glorious copy about the spirit and saving the day and was accompanied by swishing noises.

PHILIPS. The inventors of the CD (so, aaah, what about CDI then, eh?) turned its hand to the console scene with its G7000. Ho hum.

POSTERN. This is where Mike 'Midwinter' Singleton's earliest projects appeared, Shadowfax among them. But Postern's greatest achievement was 3D Deep Space – the world's first (and last) blue 'n' red 3D home computer game.

PRIESTLEY, DON. Responsible for Popeye, Trapdoor and Flunky, and now Gregory Loses His Clock (Mastertronic: 2.99 on Spectrum and Amstrad, with no plans for 16-bit conversions). Unfortunately, he's a bit p'd off with industry, and so has gone back to being a teacher.

PSION. Worthy of mention for its racing game Chequered Flag (written by Bitmap Brother Steve Kelly) and Match Point – the best computer tennis game ever apart from Nintendo's effort.

QUICKSILVA. Some of its highlights are Meteor Storm (with Speech!), 4D Time Gate (a Star Raiders-style shoot 'em up), Boogaboo The Flea, Traffic (the world's only traffic-light simulation – and it was super), and See Saw (funny fun with a blob, a seesaw, blocks and a castle full of monsters).

RABBIT. A version of Scramble was Rabbit's most impressive release, but two that shouldn't be forgotten are the controversial Stalag 19 and Paratroopers.

REELAX GAMES. Didn't last long, which wasn't surprising after its dire debut releases: Gertie Goose (chase the goose around the kitchen table...), Pod, and One Bite Too Deep.

RICHARD SHEPHERD SOFTWARE. Who could forget Transylvanian Tower and Everest Ascent? Erm... I have.

RITMAN, JON. What a nice guy. A former Radio Rentals repair-man turned programmer who invented the classics Match Day, Batman, and Head Over Heels (which actually exists on ST but won't be released just yet), among others. He was writing a rather swish 3D game on the Spectrum before he was persuaded to while away the days writing equally swish things for Rare. What about the rest of us, eh, Jon?

ROMANTIC ROBOT. The only memorable work from these boys was Wriggler. And I only remember that because the company dished out some silly fluffy worm-like things to accompany the review copies.

ROMIK. Its earliest releases include Martian Raider, Moons Of Jupiter and Shark Attack for the VIC 20. It was going to release an arcade adventure entitled Nightmare, but it disappeared from the software scene before it got the chance.

SEGA. This arcade manufacturer gave us a mixture of novel and not so neat machines into which to permanently bank our 10 pees. How about: Buck Rogers, Star Trek, Zaxxon, Tapper, Wonderboy, Alien Syndrome, Space Harrier, and Out Run. For some inexplicable reason, most of the Sega's console games are incredibly dull. The Mega Drive looks marginally more interesting, but we have to wait until to September to find out officially.

SENSIBLE SOFTWARE. The two long-haired likely lads first home-grown piece was Parallax, swiftly followed by the exceptional Wizball. The team's grown since those early days, and is currently working on a host of projects, including an RPG game for Origin, something 'sporty and refreshing' for Palace (namely a tennis game), plus – coming sometime this year – a 16-bit shoot 'em up.

SIERRA-ON-LINE. Now called Sierra and impressing games players worldwide with its range of adventures. But let's not forget Frogger and BC's Quest For Tires.

SINCLAIR, SIR CLIVE. Before creating the home computer boom, The Great Man produced digital watches and calculators. But when it came to the revolution, he must have had taken out shares in peripheral manufacturers. Every home computer he's ever done seems to lack everything which is regarded as standard elsewhere, like a decent keyboard, joystick interface and even an on-off switch! This prompted electronic whizzes worldwide to produce add-ons by the skip-load. His first attempt was the Sinclair ZX80 – arguably the machine that started it all. Sinclair's low-end, memory starved but low-cost home computer was soon superceded by a sequel – the ZX81, which prompted everyone to try to squeeze chess into 1K. Talk about cramming a quart into a pint pot... OK: 'Cramming a quart into a pint pot isn't easy, that's for sure. In fact, on the face of it, it's a physical impossibility...' Sir Clive's Big Thing was the ZX Spectrum. Sinclair got the games industry ball rolling with this baby, and despite an uncanny amount of delays and excuses, his eight (well, sort of 16 when you use the BRIGHT function) colour rubber-keyed 16 or 48K games machine captured the public's and the software houses' imaginations. And it's still going strong in various incarnations. But then he went and blew it all with the Sinclair QL (the world's first 16-bit home computer) and the Sinclair PC200 – a (very) low-end PC compatible, with a slow processor and four-colour graphics, it was basically a big step backwards. Notable Sinclair non-event horizons include the Sinclair Micro-Drive, the Sinclair C5, and the Sinclair MicroTelly.

SMITH, JOHN. This super chap managed to coax some impressive sonics out of the Spectrum. He also wrote Cobra for Ocean – on the Spectrum anyway – which was just so much fun, and included such Stallone-esque quips as Murda instead of fire and Game Under. John now works for Special FX, for whom he wrote Red Heat.

SMITH, MATTHEW. Gave us those platform pranks in the form of Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy, but couldn't quite manage to deliver Attack Of The Killer Mutant Chickens From Mars (or words to that effect). The reason is a little too sensitive to explain here.

SOFTEK. Perhaps better known these days as The Edge, Softek started life boasting bigger, better and bigger games than anyone else. Unfortunately, some of them were bigger and more boring – like Quo Vadis (a large, multi-directional scrolling platform game), Almazz (a large, multi-directional scrolling arcade adventure), Brian Bloodaxe (a large, Jet Set Willy-esque platform-cum-adventure game) and Wizardry. Fairlight I and II (one of the first very interactive isometric adventures), and Bobby Bearing (an excellent Spindizzy-Marble Madness-ish 'adventure' which sadly will never appear on 16-bit) on the other hand, were notable successes for all concerned. The Edge has gone on to release a host of licensed wares, including the Garfield and Snoopy adventures. The Punisher, The X-Men and The A-Team are three of the company's latest acquisitions for conversion to home computer.

SOFTWARE PROJECTS. Matthew Smith's Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy are arguably Software Projects' best-known releases. But it's had a fair share of other fare, such as Tribble Trubble, Thrusta, Push Off, Crazy Balloon (written by the same guy who converted Manic Miner to the 64), Dinky Doo (perhaps the first game to feature music while the game loaded), Space Joust and Star Paws (a Road Runner-esque romp written by a guy called John Darnell who also wrote Kane for Mastertronic – just for the record, John no longer programs and now lives in Australia). Software Projects' most impressive feat was the better than successful conversions of Don Bluth's Dragon's Lair and Escape From Singe's Castle to the 64 – more notably the latter as the gameplay was a considerable improvement over the original. And just when everyone thought the company'd disappeared, it came up trumps with the long overdue 16-bit versions of Manic Miner.

SPEECH SYNTHESIS. Nowadays it's all sampled this and sampled that. But none of this modern malarkey is as much fun as the old DIY Currah cartridge-based system or the even older Intellivision system's croaky throat. Only Amiga owners can really relive these golden moments thanks to the built-in babble.

SUPERIOR. One of the few publishers to continue to support the Acorn series of home computers, even though everyone else has forgotten about them. Superior made its name with the Repton series of Boulderdash-alikes, and tried to do even gooder by acquiring the licence to the geezer in the Milk Tray adverts. Nothing was ever seen of the game.

SYNAPSE. All's been quiet on this once-great American publisher's front for many years now. Among its finest are the arcade 'adventures' Shamus I, II and III (the first two platforms and ladders romps, in the Rick Dangerous vein, were the best of all), Fort Apocalypse (a multi-directional scrolling shoot 'em up in which you rescued soldiers in distress from a large, hazard-filled cavernous complex), Alley Cat (written by Bill 'Knights Of The Crystallion' Williams, this was a bizarre but brilliant sequence of arcade games in which you controlled a cat and had to do cat-like things such as chasing a bird around a living room), and Slamball (a scrolling pinball game with a difference – a smiley ball!). It's a great, great shame that not of this stuff is on 16-bit.

SYSTEM 3. Who could forget this company's debut, the 'Graphically Amazing' Death Star Interceptor (ho ho). Fortunately for System 3's Big Cheese Mark Cale, Archer Maclean's International Karate put him on the road to success. Along the way Mark picked up Twister: Mother Of Sluts ('Like all women, she comes again' went the ending), The Last Ninja, Ninja II (so the first obviously wasn't), and Bangkok Knights (oh dear). In more recent times, System 3's knocked out IK+ and Dominator, and is about to unleash 16-bit versions of Myth, Tusker, and Flimbo's Quest (see the Work In Progress in Issue 19).

SYSTEM 15000. The world's first hacking simulation presented the player with the task of discovering the telephone numbers and access codes of companies and hacking into their systems. Written by an almost unheard of pop star, there were no fancy graphics, but believe it or not this adventure of sorts was 'captain'. It's a great pity nothing more has been heard since.

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